



**Mid-Term Review of Grassroots Women's Leadership
Rupantar**

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Abbreviations

LGSP	Local Governance Support Programme
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NBK	Nari Bikas Kendra
OD	Organisational Development
PIC	Project Implementation Committee
SC	Standing Committee
SDLG	Strengthening Democratic Local Governance
UCC	Union Coordination Committee
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UzCC	Upazila Coordination Committee
UzP	Upazila parishad
VAW	Violence Against Women
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WC	Ward Committee

Executive summary

Rupantar a well-established and locally embedded NGO in south-western Bangladesh has been supported by SDC since 1998 to develop grassroots women leadership. This fourth phase of support (February 2011-January 2014) is nearing completion. The MTR was conducted through a series of focused interviews, group-based discussions and reflection sessions (over 7 days), culminating in a feedback session with Rupantar senior management in Khulna and a detailed presentation of key findings to SDC staff in Dhaka.

Phase 4 has a clear conceptual framework that links the relationships between demand and response; and uses information (knowledge) and advocacy as a means to change the rules of the game that determine the space for women's voice to be articulated, heard and responded to. It focuses clearly on empowering women to have individual voice and agency, as well as building their voice through the strength of collective action. At the same time it supports women's empowerment to engage in all levels of decision-making including the development of their skills for formal political engagement at the union and upazilla levels. The parallel processes to support the development of a new Rupantar also help to align internal change with the types of external change developed through the NBKs.

Main conclusions

Rupantar has demonstrated that the NBKs are a robust model of women's empowerment and political engagement that continue to develop women's agency and voice. The approach is both highly relevant to the current political context as well as effective. It is already able to demonstrate contribution to its goal through direct impacts on 5,000 extreme poor women's livelihoods through their access to safety net services and an increase in access to assets for at least 80,000 poor women and men through better targeting of a range of training and services.

A new breed of political leaders is emerging that are not part of the existing political patronage networks. They have a deep understanding of the rights and entitlements of women and disadvantaged people and the capacity to influence allocation decisions to ensure services and assets match these rights. The NBKs are now at a critical juncture as they develop as independent organisations making decisions about their future direction. The fundamental challenge that must be addressed by the NBKs and Rupantar is how to ensure that the NBKs do not themselves become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women's voice where women themselves are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons.

Rupantar is going through a major organisational development process that is going to lead to extensive structural change. By the end of 2013 the degree to which these changes have been embedded will be clear, but currently it is on track with evidence of high degrees of commitment and support to the changes. It is important that Rupantar complete this transformation as quickly as possible with the implementation of new systems, structures, staffing and skills in place in a short transition phase. If the phase is too long and the transformation incomplete it will destabilise the organisation.

Main Recommendations

There are detailed recommendations made in the text for Rupantar's three outcomes, as well as discussion of the conceptual basis for future programming around women's empowerment and political engagement. The main areas of recommendation for each outcome are as follows:

Outcome 1: NBKs as independent agencies (Recommendations R1-R5)

Progress with this outcome has been good with clear evidence that NBKs are now recognised and respected as formal social organisations for establishing and claiming grass-root women’s rights, promoting social justice and securing adequate services for the poor and poorest women (and men). NBK leaders have established their leadership in the local-level political arena. Women members have demonstrated significant skills individually as leaders and advocates both on behalf of themselves and for the rights of others. The decision to move outside the households into public arenas has translated into a major movement for change in these 4 upazillas.

This phase has revealed a number of important second generation issues that need to be tackled by the NBKs with support from Rupantar. These include internal governance issues concerning access to decision-making processes, ensuring mechanisms for leadership development and replacement at all levels and fair access for more disadvantaged women, mechanisms for information sharing and internal accountability. Critically the NBKs need to build a shared understanding of their future direction and clarify their role as women empowerment organisations as opposed to women development organisations. Supporting the NBKs to ensure they do not become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women’s voice where women are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons. Further developing the political ladder is critical to providing opportunities for all to access the skills needed for competing in the formal political arena at union and upazilla levels.

Outcome 2: LGIs supportive of rights, entitlements for women relevant development (Recommendations R6-R7)

There is clear evidence of increased responsiveness by UPs, upazilla parishads, government and NGO service providers to support the rights and entitlements of women. Services and budgets indicate increased targeting to extreme poor and poor households based on advocacy by NBKs. NBK members have successfully entered the formal political arena at both union and upazilla level, extending their formal influence into changes in service provision, dispute resolution and assertion of rights. However, building the model for political engagement beyond the union level brings major challenges. Rupantar and the NBKs need to understand the power dynamics at upazilla level and strategise how to develop the effectiveness of NBK actions both through the upazilla coordinating committee, as well as through wider campaigning. Rupantar needs to consider partnering with other organisations that are focused on support to development of UPs and upazilla parishads to improve the interface between the NBK structures and local government structures.

Outcome 3: Organisational development (OD) of Rupantar (Recommendation R8)

The OD process is currently on-track with its proposed activities. It is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the process until the strategic plan is developed and the consequent restructuring around a programmatic approach is achieved. At this stage it is clear there is a lot of support for the process internally and a clear understanding at each level of the organization of the purpose of the OD process. However, Rupantar has grown from a small highly personalised organisation to a large complex structure with unclear systems and processes. The OD process is slowly resolving these issues but it will take time to put in place the new structures and systems necessary to make Rupantar fit for the current context. One of the biggest challenges is making the shift from highly projectised structures to a programmatic approach. A programme approach requires different types of skills and capabilities and there are questions about whether the existing staff have the capabilities to

make the shift from single project management to thematic and multiple project management. It will entail financial and human costs to manage this transition Rupantar needs to put in place funding that will help to cover these costs and ensure the transition can be managed smoothly and quickly.

Actions to be completed before end of Phase 4 (R9-10)

There are a series of detailed actions to be completed before the end of phase 4, including a review of internal governance mechanisms of the NBKs and higher-level structures; development of the conceptual base for the women's empowerment model, building the evidence base for this model from further analyses; and addressing a series of risks that are part of the second generation issues that have emerged this phase.

Future development of the women's empowerment model (R11)

The MTR outlines the conceptual base for future Rupantar interventions in women's empowerment, leadership and political engagement. This includes using the model as the basis for future programmatic work by Rupantar in areas of climate resilient governance. This would include phased expansion into new constituencies in Khulna Division that exemplify a range of climate, social and economic vulnerabilities, providing an important testing ground for the model and a strengthened base for a women's movement that could have regional and national policy effect.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Mid-Term Review

Rupantar a NGO based in Khulna, founded in 1992 has been supported by SDC since 1998 through a pilot phase (1998-2000) and four other phases of funding (2000-2004 and 2004-2007, 2007-2010 and 2011-2014) to develop grassroots women leadership through a series of processes of empowerment. This fourth phase of support - 'Grassroots Women's Leadership' - started in February 2011 and ends in January 2014. It operates in 32 unions, 4 upazillas in two districts of Khulna Division – Khulna and Bagerhat Districts. This fourth phase has focused on continued support to institutionalise the Nari Bikas Kendras established under previous phases, as well as on a process of internal change for Rupantar. This mid-term review is 2 years and 4 months into the 3 years of this fourth phase, so is relatively late in terms of subsequent actions to address recommendations, particularly as Rupantar have been asked by SDC to develop a concept note for potential programmatic funding by June/July. The reviewers have therefore focused on those recommendations that are critical to deliver before the end of the project and that are achievable within the final 8 months of the project. The team have also made suggestions for potential programmatic focus beyond 2014 on women's empowerment.

Specifically the review has three main objectives that provide the structure for the report:

- To review progress towards achieving the objectives and outcomes and recommendations for enhancing relevance, effectiveness and sustainability within the current phase
- To analyse and review the institutional development progress of Rupantar
- To assess the programmatic opportunities of Rupantar and provide a conceptual base for future Rupantar interventions in the area of women empowerment and leadership

The TORs are provided in Annex 1.

1.2 Methodology and report structure

The MTR team¹ brought a range of experience from Bangladesh and other countries which it drew on for its assessment of project progress. In particular the team has extensive experience of local governance, empowerment processes (voice and agency) particularly for women, political analysis, poverty programmes, and decentralisation processes. This was enhanced through a review of key project documents and other materials which are drawn on in this report; field visits to the four working area upazillas (Dacope, Rampal, Mongla and Batiaghata), focus group discussions, and individual semi-structured interviews (see Annex 2 for a detailed discussion of methods and people met) were drawn on to inform the team's understanding.

The report is structured in 5 sections. Section 1 provides a brief introduction to the context, objectives and methods used by the MTR team. Section 2 reviews the achievements and limitations for each of the three project outcomes. Section 3 looks at the immediate actions the project needs to undertake. Section 4 considers future programming opportunities for developing and expanding the women empowerment and political engagement model developed through SDC's 15 years of support to Rupantar. Each section has a series of recommendations all of which have been discussed at meetings with Rupantar staff and with SDC meetings. They are summarised in Annex 5 with Table A5.1 indicating priority, time-frame and lead responsibility for action.

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1.3 National Context

This review is conducted during a period of intense political instability with frequent national level strikes disrupting work at all levels. This injects a level of uncertainty into everyone's lives but also underlines the importance of the political empowerment work that this project is supporting, developing understanding amongst 55,000 women of their rights and entitlements, pressing for gender equality at all levels, and developing their capacity to advocate effectively. Much abuse against women at household and community level has been successfully fought against by this movement and significant changes are already in place from household, to community to union levels.

Since the last MTR there have been several changes in the local context that affect the interpretation of results of the project. The union parishad elections in 2011 provided an opportunity to test the model of women's empowerment to see how effective the NBK women members could be in formal elections. This changed the local dynamics of the NBKs which together with their formal registration has increased their respect and influence at local level. Women's entry into these elected spaces and their experiences in negotiating with other actors have led to changes in their aspirations and increased their voice and legitimacy within their communities (Nazneen and Tasneem 2010). However, there still remain major barriers to women's full participation in the formal political processes, which constrain the degree to which women can achieve their potential in the local government arenas. Both formal and informal rules of the game operate against women including the highly patriarchal attitudes and behaviours of elected men (Annex 12 provides a more detailed analysis of these issues).

During this phase there has been a large influx of donor funds in response to the areas most affected by cyclone Aila. Post disaster, the EU, DFID, USAID and GIZ have all initiated projects to enhance the livelihood security of the extreme poor in climate vulnerable areas such as the Sundarbans. These projects cover all four upazillas supported under the Grassroots Women Leaders project. They have created many opportunities for the poorest households and for NBK women leaders, leading to an increase in the quantum of services available to poorest households as well as some evidence that extreme poor households are reducing their levels of poverty. In addition, these upazillas benefit from the presence of ruling party parliamentarians with access to enhanced numbers of safety net services which are used to increase vote banks as an important strategy of any party in power. Again this affects the level of responsiveness of service providers to the extreme poor and needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the effectiveness of the NBKs.

1.4 Project context to the review

Phase 4 of the project has focused on deepening the processes established in previous phases and in particular in supporting the inclusion of extreme poor women as NBK members and supporting NBK women to engage in the formal political processes (Annex 6 reviews changes in the project phases). This phase has a developed outcome-based monitoring and reporting system with good evidence of data collection and reporting. Although the reporting shows significant improvements compared to the last MTR (2009), there is still limited analysis of changes or trends and the monitoring database is difficult to use and to interpret.

Progress since last MTR

The review team has reviewed the progress since the last mid-term review, including a detailed review of the 2009 MTR recommendations. A full assessment is provided in Annex 4. There has

been action to implement most of the recommendations with some of the organisational development (OD) recommendations being addressed during this phase of OD support (Annex 11).

The logframe

The usual process for a MTR is to focus on the logframe and to use it to check and verify progress using the indicators as a means of assessment, and checking the evidence base provided. For this phase Rupantar's log-frame provides a good basis from which to assess progress; it clearly reflects the theory of change underlying the project and provides good causal logic to understand how the outputs will contribute to the achievement of outcomes and the outcomes to the impact (goal). Rupantar provided a commentary on progress which is presented in Annex 7 together with an assessment made by the MTR team on logframe progress. Although the monitoring data-base is full of information, its analysis is relatively limited and reporting tends to mainly focus on numbers of actions undertaken, rather than a more sophisticated analysis of changes over time. This has made it more difficult for the MTR to provide evidence of change based on the project's monitoring data. Much of our assessment is therefore based on discussions in the field with a range of stakeholders and staff.

Future directions

The TORs for the MTR indicate that a proportion of the review mission should be focused on looking forward. Based on discussions with all stakeholders and staff Sections 3 and 4 describe a possible future scenario for developing the women's empowerment approach that has been tested in these 32 unions. This includes a discussion of the necessary actions that have to have been achieved before the end of this current phase of funding. These actions are focused on ensuring that any implementation of the women's empowerment approach is based on the best understanding of past practice and incorporates the key elements needed to develop the approach in new areas.

2. Assessment of project achievements and limitations

2.1 Introduction to project outcomes

This section reviews the achievements of Rupantar to date, focusing on an assessment of the robustness of the pathways and strategies selected to deliver on its three outcomes and goal. We consider the relevance and effectiveness of the approaches developed by the project. We have also added our interpretation of the underlying theory of change to try to further develop the conceptual underpinning to this project (discussed further in Section 4).

Goal: To improve the **access** to livelihood **assets** and **services** for rural women, particularly the **poorest**, through strengthening their **voice** and **agency**

Outcomes:

1. NBKs **independently** work as **agencies** of rural women, particularly the poor to **demand** and **secure** adequate services provided by local government as well as to **influence** local decision making processes in favour of women's oriented local development (*words highlighted are the key words that we looked for evidence to demonstrate capability of the NBKs*)
2. LGIs supportive to women relevant development, support **rights** and **entitlements** of women with conducive and inclusive policies (*following discussions with the team we looked for evidence of the types of **decisions** taken in favour of women rather than policies – since the NBKs are not yet able to influence national-level processes only local-level*)

3. Rupantar's organisational set up based on a clearly defined **strategic plan**; management efficient and results oriented (*we assessed **progress** towards delivery of this outcome, as the organisational development work is still underway*)

Phase 4 has a clear conceptual framework that links the relationships between demand and response; and uses information (knowledge) and advocacy as a means to change the rules of the game that determine the space for women's voice to be heard and responded to. It focuses clearly on empowering women to have individual voice and agency, as well as building their voice through the strength of collective action. At the same time as it supports women's empowerment to engage in all levels of decision-making there has also been an overt strategy to develop their skills for formal political engagement at the union and upazilla levels. The parallel processes to support the development of a new Rupantar also help to align internal change with the types of external change developed through the NBKs.

The three outcomes are assessed in turn focusing on achievements, limitations and recommendations for action. Detailed assessment is provided in Annex? The main highlights are summarised here.

2.2 Outcome 1: NBKs as independent agencies

Outcome 1: *NBKs independently work as agencies of rural women, particularly the poor, to demand and secure adequate (women's relevant) services provided by local governments, as well as to influence local decision-making processes in favour of women's oriented local development endeavours (demand-side)*

2.2.1 Achievements: independence of NBKs as demand-side agencies

Summary achievement: *Progress with this outcome has been good with clear evidence that NBKs are now recognised and respected as formal social organisations for establishing and claiming grass-root women's rights, promoting social justice and securing adequate services for the poor and poorest women (and men). NBK leaders have established their leadership in the local-level political arena. Women members have demonstrated significant skills individually as leaders and advocates both on behalf of themselves and for the rights of others. The decision to move outside the households into public arenas has translated into a major movement for change in these 4 upazillas.*

The words highlighted in the outcome statement above indicate the areas of assessment for the MTR. The team focused on understanding the degree of independence of the NBKs and their capacity to act as agents of rural women. This includes the changes in individual women as well as the changes in the overall organisation.

Organisational changes:

Since 2009 all 32 NBKs are now formally registered with the Department of Women Affairs. They are operating as organisations with regular meetings and reporting structures, including production of annual plans and budgets. Bylaws developed by the NBKs have led to the removal of inactive NBK leaders². All have small funds available that are based on fees charged to those who are in leadership positions on the committees at ward and union-level. There are no general membership fees charged. This money has been used to help support the campaigns of women

² This has occurred in 14 union level committees and 187 ward committees

members who sought election to the union parishads. The NBKs also operate small saving funds for women in leadership positions; however, as discussed below this is beginning to drive a call for a savings function to be extended to all women members.

The formal recognition of the NBKs and their registration has led to a significant change in how they are viewed by NGO and government organisations. It has enhanced their voice and agency and the levels of responsiveness from service providers. Government service providers (interviewed during the MTR) indicated they have a very high level of trust in the NBKs and as a result are using the NBKs to identify recipients for safety net and other livelihood based services. Compared to other organisations NBKs are considered to be transparent and accountable. The lists of extreme poor drawn up by the NBKs are used in preference to those supplied by other sources such as the union parishad.

The evidence of this trust and **agency** of the NBKs is provided in the number of services that have been targeted to NBK members and extreme poor non-members. In the case of the extreme poor who are receiving services as a result of NBK interventions, it can be said with confidence that these families would not have had these services without the effectiveness of the demands by the NBKs. Looking at the data this amounts to an additional 3% of families gaining social safety nets. Although this figure does not look very high, it is important to underline that these are households that are generally invisible and have very limited social networks and capacity to influence the union parishad to allocate safety nets to them. As Table 1 shows there has been particular success in allocating the 40 days scheme to an additional 5% of families. This scheme is an important safety-net and does have the potential to make a real difference to the livelihoods of the extreme poor.

Table 1: influence of NBKs over social safety net allocations to the extreme poor

Safety net	UP provision (numbers of people)	NBK additions (numbers of people)	% addition
Old age pension	26312	685	2.5%
Widow pension	17070	450	2.6%
Disabled allowance	2233	61	2.7%
Pregnant woman allowance	2262	71	3.0%
VGF	103861	2007	2.0%
VGD	26714	654	2.4%
40 days	22285	1115	5%
Source: project monitoring data			

Identification and targeting of services to extreme poor: the effective targeting of training and other services to extreme poor and poor members and non-members. NBKs have developed lists of extreme poor households based on the criteria derived by the NBK and a series of house-to-house visits by NBK members. In some cases these lists are developed with key informants at ward-level in the open so everyone is aware of what is being done. This has helped to ensure that the UP chair respects the list and does not cancel it.

The NBKs use these lists a) to advocate on behalf of these households at union and upazilla level; and b) to present to service providers to aid their identification and targeting of households that fit the criteria of extreme poor for receipt of services. Project data indicate that over 165,000 vulnerable women and extreme poor have benefited from the intervention of NBK members for a range of services and activities (from productive services – fisheries, agriculture, livestock training and inputs, to support to obtaining citizenship certificates and birth certificates) (Annual operational report 2013:3).

Apart from the results derived from their influence over targeting of services, NBK members are increasingly recognised as **key arbitrators** in shalish at the local level by both men and women. As was already demonstrated in Phase 3 women are now actively involved in a range of local dispute resolution processes, including the most contentious areas such as land. There have been notable successes in reduction in numbers of early marriage and dowries. The perceived independence of the NBKs contributes to the effectiveness of women members. This combined with the women's increasing access to information, legal support, and capacity to argue with credibility and logic has led to much higher levels of influence at union and upazilla levels (source: MTR field notes).

The benefits of an enlarged membership base: At the upazilla level the increased size of membership of the NBKs provides an additional source of power to the upazilla coordination committee. Large-scale representation and capacity to mobilise women against an important issue have helped to consolidate the position of the NBK as an important force at the upazilla level. They have credible and direct relationships with a range of service providers and are able to connect their members directly to a range of services.

Congruence between NBK structures and local government structures – the building of the political ladder. The development of NBK organisational structures at ward, union and upazilla level mirroring the major tiers of elected local government has enhanced the relevance and effectiveness of the NBK as a movement for advocacy. It has also positioned NBK leaders to take advantage of building individual political networks to gain visibility and credibility to contest in local government elections. These parallel structures are another important element of sustaining the independence of the NBKs as there are clear audiences for NBK advocacy and also clear mechanisms for response at each of these levels.

2.2.2 Achievements: Individuals – changes in voice and agency (empowerment)

Changes in agency and voice: There have been substantial changes in the levels of agency and voice of individual members of the NBKs. The new strategies, started in phase 3 and developed further in phase 4 to encourage new membership in each ward, have meant there is greater reach to more poor and extreme poor households. The NBK process provides a **'breeding ground'** for the development of poor and extreme poor women's political participation. It has had the beneficial effects of encouraging more women to take the major step of moving from their households into more public arenas, first through attending courtyard meetings and then participating in campaigns and more formal meetings of the NBKs. There are now 55,000 women members of NBKs in the 32 unions (compared to 19,500 in 2009).

Extreme poor using the agency of others to advocate on their behalf: Even where non-members have not been able to join the NBKs because their extreme poverty leaves them with little time to actively participate in the groups, they fully understand the role of the NBK members and are able to use them to advocate on their behalf. Previously such households talk about their invisibility to those in power and as a result the complete denial of their rights. The extreme poor with less agency are now using women NBK members to resolve conflicts and to defend and claim their rights on their behalf. Although their agency to voice for themselves has not yet developed they are now sufficiently confident (showing increase in agency) to raise their voices with NBK leaders in the knowledge there is a greater chance of their voices being heard by service providers through the agency of the NBK leaders.

Building the social capital and sense of self-worth of extreme poor: For the extreme poor even if not members of the NBK there is a strong sense of their social capital increasing as they have access to a large and influential group of women who can advocate on their behalf. When the extreme poor women become members of the group there is an increase in their self-worth, where previously they were ignored they are now provided with respect when they are part of the NBK:

‘the NBK was formed in 2004 but we did not join, we’re poor and no-one asked us to join, now we can see it brings benefits, those who join the NBK have many improvements in their lives. We can also do this for ourselves and then we will also be better, we need to get our rights for ourselves’. (extreme poor recently joined NBK)

These changes in self-worth although subtle are an important first step in building the capacity of extreme poor women to have agency that extends beyond their households and will allow them to gain stronger voice and capacity to demand and receive their rights. Although difficult to quantify such changes in behaviours and attitudes during the MTR there were many examples of these changes.

Practising leadership skills by doing has been an important process that has allowed women to develop their capabilities in relatively safe environments before moving to more difficult and contentious public arenas such as the union parishads. The peer-to-peer learning has continued to be an important method for passing on skills. Experienced women leaders explain how they mentor less experienced women to run courtyard meetings. Through observation of these meetings they help the less experienced women to develop their skills. During the MTR extreme poor women who had been part of the NBK

Box 1: Changes in voice and agency of NBK members

- ‘I was in a jail in a patriarchal society, now I am a free person and can challenge patriarchy’ (NBK leader)
- ‘I knew about gender – this is a woman and this is a man, but now I know how to change roles, I do things a man can do’ (NBK leader)
- ‘Through NBK I have become a human being with human rights and particularly women’s rights’ (extreme poor woman member)
- ‘I am extreme poor - before I got no respect now when I am with NBK leaders at UP I even get a chair to sit on’ (extreme poor woman member)
- ‘Now the NBK is registered there is a big change in my life, I can now go to the upazilla as a member of registered organisation and get so much more respect’ (extreme poor woman member)

(from MTR interviews with NBK members)

Continuing from phase 3 women demonstrate a **high level of capacity for mobility and voice**. Movement out of the private sphere into the public arena is seen in both conservative Hindu and Muslim areas and cuts across well-being classes. Even amongst the extreme poor there are signs of change, as access to social safety nets has given them a small amount of increased livelihood security that has enabled them to take the time to engage with NBK meetings. This in its turn has led to improvements in their capacity to advocate on their own behalf (Box 1).

There are clear changes in poor women’s capacity to have **their own voice** rather than other people voicing for them. The quality of voice has also improved. During meetings held in the MTR with extreme poor and poor women members as well as with service providers, there were many

examples of extremely articulate and well-informed women, capable of exercising their voices with great effectiveness. Comments made by local government officers and elected members underlined the increased capacity of NBK women: ‘they are able to use information and law for informed and logical arguments’ (MTR field notes).

Extreme poor emerging leaders: there are early indications of growing leadership skills in some extreme poor with representation of extreme poor women at the three major levels of leadership within the NBK – ward, union and upazilla. It is difficult to assess whether these figures are representative of the population as a whole (or whether there is an over or under representation), as there are no data indicating for each union what the overall population of extreme poor and poor is. What is apparent is a declining trend in the percentage of extreme poor households at higher levels of leadership and representation (Table 2). This is not surprising given it is a relatively recent policy of the project to promote extreme poor women’s membership of the NBKs.

Table 2: Percentage of extreme poor and poor members of NBK decision-making committees: ward, union and upazilla and central coordination

	General committee			Executive committee		
	Poor	Poorest	Others	Poor	Poorest	Others
Ward committees						
288 committees	67%	12%	21%	59%	14%	27%
Union committees						
32 unions	57%	16%	27%	54%	13%	34%
Upazilla coordination committee						
Batiaghata	48%	14%	38%	78%	11%	11%
Dacope	30%	0	70%	56%	0	44%
Mongla	78%	0	22%	89%	0	11%
Rampal	50%	23%	27%	56%	11%	33%
% total	49%	10%	41%	69%	6%	25%
Central committee						
	20%	0%	80%	22%	0%	78%
Source: project monitoring data						

2.2.3 Limitations and challenges of outcome 1

Independence and sustainability of NBKs

Dealing with partisan pressures: As with any successful social movement that mobilises large numbers of people there are inevitable **partisan pressures**. This translates into some evidence of party political pressure on NBKs to be used as vote banks. Discussions with UP chairs for example illustrate their complete understanding of the importance of the NBKs to their own positions and their active courting of the NBK membership. The risks of the NBKs becoming co-opted by particular groups locally is an important issue for them to address as part of developing their capacity to act as independent, democratic bodies. This includes working with NBK members to build their understanding of the importance of maintaining independence in their work to advocate on behalf of their group or disadvantaged households that are not members of the NBK; efforts to advocate on behalf of one household as opposed to another can easily be construed by others to be a sign of being politically partisan. (Recommendation 1).

Reducing the role of the union organiser in direct support to NBKs: building the independence of the NBKs is a key element of this phase. To ensure they are able to manage their internal affairs, run effective meetings and have the appropriate levels of support, the union organisers have continued to facilitate NBK activities. Although there is now only 1 union organiser per union they still play an important role in the NBK processes including participating in their monthly meetings, in order to monitor what is happening. It is important for the last few months of this project that the union organisers reduce their input to the NBKs in a phased and strategic manner. This will require the

project to assess the NBKs level of competence to run their own meetings and for the NBKs to determine the level of support they need from the project (Recommendation 4).

Maintaining the social movement role of NBKs as agents of change: Local government at both upazilla and union level are highly vocal in their appreciation and support to the NBKs, particularly as advocates and identifiers of those in need of particular services. Their use of the NBKs to ensure effective targeting of services is an important element of the NBK work. However, there are associated risks with this approach by NGO and GO service providers that NBKs simply become the **service delivery arms** of the service providers rather than a movement for empowerment of its members that in turn leads to better more accountable services. This pressure to deliver services on behalf of NGOs and GOs risks pushing the NBKs away from their mission to deliver rights-based voice and agency of their members to become service deliverers to member and non-members who are then simply seen as beneficiaries rather than active agents claiming their rights. As part of this problem the NBKs are still reliant on Rupantar staff to help them to link to key actors as well as to help them develop the right types of strategies to deal with local power dynamics and the associated risks. This is going to be of increasing importance to the NBKs, as they become more effective they will challenge power relations even more. The risks they will run will be greater and the need to understand these risks and to be able to identify strategies to deal with difficult power relations becomes even more urgent. (Recommendation 4)

The effects of NBK registration under the Department of Women Affairs: in addition to the pressure from NBK members and service providers for the NBKs to become development organisations, registration under the Department of Women Affairs brings its own pressures. Registration has given the NBKs formal and legal status, but whilst registering the NBKs did not give much attention to articulating their own mandates of women's empowerment as political as opposed to economic empowerment. Rather the constitutions emphasise that the NBK is a non-political voluntary development organization focused on mobilizing savings and implementing income generating projects by providing loans to its target population. This constitutes a serious threat to the underlying mandate of the NBKs and risks shifting them into women's development organizations rather than autonomous women's organization as a movement for securing rights and entitlements. This is a dilemma that has faced other women's organisations³ but they have dealt with it by clarifying in their constitutions that they are not women's development organisations. This has been agreed through consultation with members and discussion with the Department for Women's Affairs. For example, being a registered organization of women's affairs department, Naripokkho's constitution straightforwardly articulates their mandates that they are working for women's empowerment. (Recommendation 4)

Accountability to members – the importance of participation, information and feedback. As the NBKs grow in size with a large influx of new members there is an increasing risk that decision-making becomes more remote from the general members and consolidated amongst a few women. The structures established prior to phases 3 and 4 were based on a small group of women in each ward (45) selecting their leaders at ward-level who then selected leaders for the union. This process has tended to be maintained during this phase even though there are now hundreds of women members in the general membership, but there appears to be relatively limited sharing of information and feedback between these members and the leaders at the different levels. It is a

³ For example Naripokkho has clarified its mandate in the constitution Clause 3: Aims and objectives of the organisation: **Aims:** Sub-clause (1): All women in Bangladesh will be counted as human, having rights and dignity to their families, society and state; Sub-clause (2): Naripokkho will play significant role in establishing women's rights and transforming women social position; **Objectives:** Sub-clause (1): Naripokkho will play significant role in strengthening women's movements nationwide; Sub-clause (2): Naripokkho will provide specific and different programs and play an effective role in achieving equal rights and respect to women.

critical element of building the sustainability of these groups that these feedback and accountability systems are carefully developed inside the NBKs. This will also allow development of democratic decision-making processes at all levels to ensure that the NBKs remain as models of how good governance processes can operate. (Recommendation 1)

This solidification of the old structures of the NBKs is also leading to a **reduced space for new leadership** to emerge from the new grassroots members. This could threaten the future sustainability of the organisation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that as the NBK leaders become more effective as advocates they are becoming more involved in other activities. This is leading to reduced time for supporting the development of NBKs and ensuring leadership succession. (Recommendation 2)

Identification and targeting of extreme poor: during the MTR the team reviewed the processes used for identification and targeting of extreme poor both to encourage their membership of the NBKs and also to ensure they receive the services they are entitled to (Annex 9 presents a more detailed review). Although NBK members appear to have a clear idea of how to identify extreme poor and there have been few complaints about the lists constructed, the use of the list depends on the relationships the NBK members have with the UP and upazilla officers. The process used by the NBKs has not yet led to a standardised approach that ends with the construction of one agreed list of the extreme poor. Other local governance projects supported by SDC have also tested out useful approaches to the identification of extreme poor that have gained wider acceptability across the union. These other projects provide an opportunity for Rupantar to support the NBKs to share experiences and to strengthen the approaches they are using. (Recommendation 3)

Central coordination committee (division-level) risk of undermining independence of the NBKs: the project has built **NBK organisational structures** before the need has evolved with the establishment of a central coordination committee at the division-level in Khulna. This committee was formed to improve the levels of advocacy at division and access to key individuals with skills and networks that could provide support to the NBKs. However, it is a project structure rather than a structure that has emerged from the NBK movement itself. It confuses the need for a body where key advisers (particularly on legal issues) can be brought together with a NBK governance structure. These should be entirely separate. Currently, the executive committee of 9 individuals comprises 6 members from Khulna and only 3 members from the NBKs. This committee runs counter to the organic evolution of NBK organisational structures and runs a high risk of domination and influence by an urban-based middle class that could undermine the independence of the NBKs. (Recommendation 4)

Limitations to individual agency

Phase 4 is characterised by a strong focus on **political engagement** because of the local elections, as opposed to the previous focus on women's empowerment. This phase has tended to focus more on supporting NBK members to campaign for formal political roles in the UP and Upazilla as well as supporting the development of higher-level NBK organisational structures. It is important to develop these higher levels of the political ladder, but attention to these levels has tended to divert attention from building the bottom rungs of the ladder particularly to allow extreme poor women opportunities to climb onto the political ladder. There has been a loss of focus on development of second and third tier leaders, the project has not continued to support leadership training and capacity building at this level as it did in previous phases. (Recommendation 2)

Voice and presence of the extreme poor is still weak: it is mainly voice **for** the extreme poor but not voice **of** extreme poor (beneficiaries not citizens). There are still **strong cultural barriers to inclusion** expressed by the extreme poor, particularly those who are not members of the NBKs.

They still consider themselves to be voiceless, and state clearly that others do not see them as human beings and so NBKs are not organisations that are meant for them. Major **economic barriers** to inclusion overlie these cultural and psychological barriers for extreme poor. Where there has been some change and capacity to engage in the NBKs is where either the household has gained access to a safety net service through the NBK and/or has watched the changes and improvements in livelihoods that NBK members have undergone. This has then encouraged the extreme poor to join on the understanding that as a member of the NBK there are better opportunities for economic empowerment to go side by side with political empowerment. However, the data from the project reveal that since 2009, despite a strong focus on increasing membership from the extreme poor households, there has been an apparent decline in general membership as well as membership in the ward level committees (Annex 8 Table A8.1).

There are a series of contextual reasons that might explain these changes including a major change in farming methods in some of the upazillas. Following large protests by NBKs, local elected representative and citizen leaders shrimp farming has been stopped on agricultural land. This has created major opportunities for local farmers to return to productive paddy cultivation and increased the amount of day labour available for the poorest women and men over the last 4 years. In addition, new cultivation practices of watermelon have increased daily wages. Another reason also affecting daily labour opportunities is the large amount of infrastructure repair after the 2 cyclones. Together these changes could provide the answer as to why there are now far fewer extreme poor households and more poor households in the project working area.⁴ However, it is clearly an area that needs further analysis and understanding (Recommendation 2).

Limited leadership spread effects: Although there have been impressive achievements in those women the MTR met and a profound degree of change in them as a result of the project, it was hard for the MTR to assess the degree to which change had spread beyond these women. There are several ways in which the project affects women's lives: 1) as members of the NBK and gaining access to leadership skills and capacity to have an effective voice (both within the household and outside); and 2) as recipients of services that have been secured by the influence of NBK members.

From the evidence already cited earlier, clearly there are a large number of people both members and non-members of the NBKs who are getting access to services who previously did not. However, it is still not clear (and there are no data to judge) how many women are getting access to leadership skills and building their direct capacity to have their own voice, rather than waiting for the NBK leaders to speak on their behalf. As Figure 1 illustrates, the original model of the NBK is now creating artificial barriers to new members moving into leadership positions.

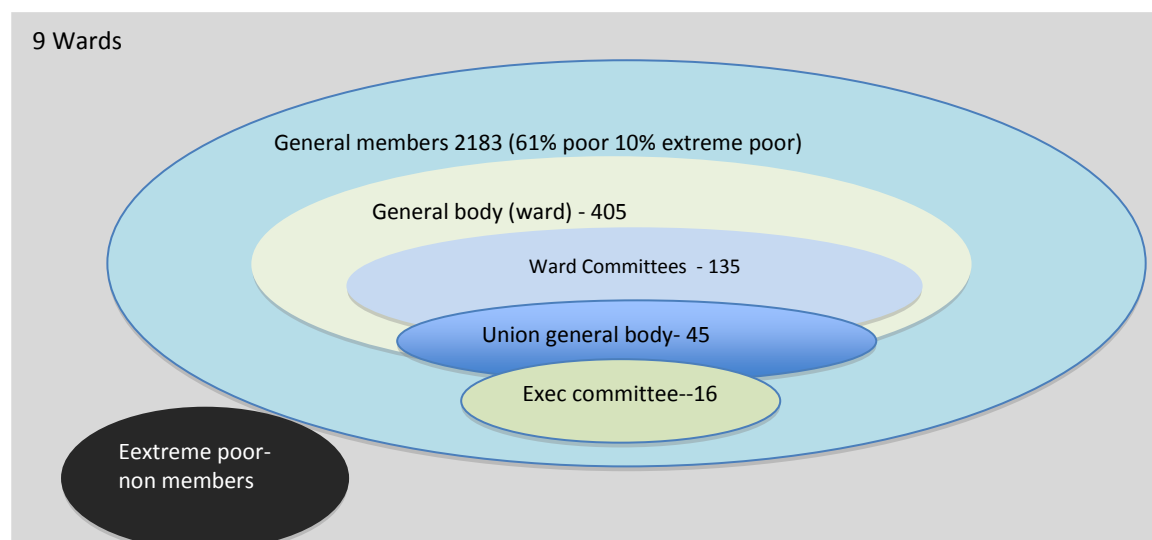
It is a very complicated structure, with the original membership limited to only 45 women per ward who then elect/select 15 ward committee members from their number. At the union-level the 45 member general body is composed of 5 members from each ward committee in the union. This body then elects the executive committee for the NBK at the union-level. This mechanism risks solidifying a small leadership pool with very limited opportunities for new members to enter into the pool. Following the expansion of the membership beyond this original 45, which has been actively pursued in this phase, it is not clear what mechanisms there are for the new members to be given equal rights to access leadership as the original 45.

The criteria for selecting leaders is generally based on those women who have already demonstrated leadership skills, are articulate and knowledgeable, generally this precludes new members and in the absence of any leadership support programme for these new members it is unclear how they will acquire the necessary skills. At worst this could mean that the leadership is

⁴ Information provided by project staff in response to queries from the MTR team about this issue

drawing on a pool of only 405 women (the original 45 women in each ward) rather than from the general membership of over 2000 women in most unions. (Recommendation 1)

Figure 1: Artificial barriers to building leadership in a union – example of Jalma Union



2.2.4 Recommendations for strengthening results under outcome 1

In summary, the project is on track to deliver what it set out to achieve for outcome 1 and can demonstrate good progress for each of its indicators. The comments and recommendations provided by the MTR are to help the project strengthen the important changes that have already been developed in these 32 unions.

The limitations to the development of NBKs identified during the MTR and also by project staff underline some of the immediate challenges facing the independence and sustainability of NBKs. There is a lack of clarity concerning the future development of the NBKs are they a movement for **women's empowerment** building voice and agency for poor and extreme poor as **citizens** or an organisation for service delivery to members as **beneficiaries** (particularly extreme poor). Currently there is a risk that the NBKs become service delivery organisations either on behalf of government and NGOs or in their own right. This risk is underlined by the demand to extend the individual savings function of the NBKs to all members. This potentially could undermine the political empowerment objective of the NBKs and their original intention as organisations that can develop the individual voice and agency of poor women and at the same time collectively amplify their voices to ensure that rights and services are secured.

Recommendation R1: improving internal governance of NBKs

Rupantar need to review with the NBKs their current internal mechanisms for decision-making and sharing of information. These reviews should be built into improving the operational procedures for good internal governance. This should include the following:

1. A review of decision-making processes in the committees and how these decisions are communicated to all members. This should include an assessment of how general members are also involved in decision-making processes.
2. A review of agenda-setting for committee meetings and how issues are identified for discussions

3. NBKs facilitated by Rupantar should put in place mechanisms to dissolve the artificial boundaries between the 'old 45' general members and the new members
4. Review and identify efficient means to share information with all members of the NBK – use of mobile phones (discuss with other SDC projects particularly SHARIQUE the different approaches that have been used for information sharing)

Recommendation R2: renewing leadership

Rupantar need to support NBKs to review the internal mechanisms to renew leadership and to ensure there are new leaders being developed at different levels of the organisation.

1. This should include analysis of the rate of turnover of leadership at all levels – ward, union and upazilla. It should include support from Rupantar to help the NBKs to develop rules concerning the length of time to be served on the committee and a limit to the number of terms.
2. Rupantar should support the NBKs to look at the barriers and opportunities for extreme poor women and other new members to access leadership positions as the basis for helping the NBKs to develop methods to increase the opportunities for new members to develop leadership skills

Recommendation R3: deepening understanding of the barriers for the extreme poor to engage in NBKs

In the 2009 MTR there was a recommendation to the project to deepen understanding of the barriers to extreme poor involvement in the NBKs. This piece of work is still required as there is still significant evidence that extreme poor are finding it difficult to access the NBKs.

1. The project should discuss with field staff and with the NBKs what issues they are facing in encouraging extreme poor women to join the NBKs. This should be supported by separate focus group discussions with extreme poor NBK members and non-NBK members to identify the barriers they perceive and ways in which they could be overcome. This should include assessment of any weaknesses in the current methods used to identify extreme poor by the NBKs.
2. As part of the planning and design for future work on women's empowerment - Rupantar should proactively engage with SDC-supported projects SHARIQUE and DASCOH to establish a discussion meeting with NBK members and participants in SHARIQUE and DASCOH who have worked on approaches to identifying extreme poor. This should lead to a strengthening of approaches used by the NBKs and a good foundation for future work in this area.

Recommendation R4: building a shared understanding of the future direction of the NBKs and means to improve their independence

Rupantar need to support the NBKs to collectively develop a shared understanding of their future direction and to clarify their objectives. As part of this Rupantar should review the following issues, NBK organisational structures and develop a programme for operational support that can be incorporated in future development of the NBKs. This work should be completed before the end of phase 4:

1. Facilitate discussions with the NBKs over their future direction to build a common consensus on how they want to develop as a social movement and to build understanding of the risks of becoming a service delivery organisation with members as beneficiaries as opposed to equal citizens capable of demanding their rights.
2. As part of the discussion process support NBKs to consider their constitutions and ways to change them. To feed into these discussions Rupantar should look at other women's organisations constitutions – including Naripokko, Nijera Kori etc.

3. Facilitate a small focused meeting on learning from other social movements to help to inform the discussions with the NBKs. This could include members of other movements such as Nijera Kori, Samata, Doorbar Network, Naripokkho, and Joyoti Societies (based in Jessore)
4. Support the NBKs to understand the tactics to deal with local power relations, the risks of partisan behaviours and use of NBKs for party political purposes
5. Support the NBKs to carry out an assessment of the levels of funds required to maintain an organisation supporting women's social and political empowerment to help the NBKs establish fund-raising strategies that will ensure they have sufficient money to support these types of objectives.
6. Support the NBKs to identify their own indicators of organisational success and build this into a participatory monitoring system that the NBKs can track and start to adjust their own practices rather than remaining reliant on the project staff to do this for them
7. The project needs to review its staffing support to the NBKs for the last months of the project and start to phase out direct support to those NBKs that are already demonstrating higher levels of competence and independence. These NBKs for example should conduct their own monthly meetings without requiring the presence of the union organiser.
8. Dissolve the central level coordination committee as it potentially undermines the independence of the NBKs. Support the NBKs to discuss and clarify the types of organisational structure for advocacy they might need at higher-levels. These structures should continue to be aligned to the local government tiers. Any advisory support the NBKs might require could be formalised in an advisory body but this should not be confused with a governance structure

2.2.5 Linking outcome 1 to outcome 2 – the effectiveness of women's political engagement

Phase 4 moved from women's empowerment to women's political engagement in formal political structures. This signifies a major achievement for the project and provides a new arena to test the validity of the model that Rupantar has been developing. The outcomes from this work link outcome 1, the effectiveness of the NBK members as advocates for women's rights, to outcome 2 the responsiveness of local government institutions.

There are some important achievements from this work that set this project apart from other local governance projects. Through its work to develop the leadership skills of grassroots women, particularly poor and now extreme poor, the project has provided a breeding ground for **a new type of political voice**. This voice is first developed through acquiring leadership skills inside the NBK and on informal committees at the local level⁵ and then is honed through political campaigning and the winning of seats on the union parishad.

The NBK members who stood for union parishad positions are mostly unconnected to the existing political elite and represent a new breed of women political leaders, well experienced and knowledgeable in advocating for women's rights. There are now 62 former NBK members in UP reserved seats with one woman gaining a highly valued and important general seat. One other woman managed to be elected as vice-chair of the upazilla parishad. These women also demonstrated that it is possible to be elected without the use of large amounts of payments to voters. Budgets for campaigning were solely used for travel expenses spending only Tk20-25,000 compared to their male rivals who were spending up to Tk300,000 to build their vote bank. These low costs also help to demonstrate that it is not only the wealthy politically connected that can seek

⁵ 1064 NBK members participated in informal elections with 104 winning executive positions and 960 in general member positions. This included school management committees, hat/bazaar committees as well as those set up by NGOs and other service providers

election, but that it is possible for poorer women without existing political connections to compete and win.

There is now the emergence of a clear **political ladder** by which these new political voices can gain access to positions of authority and influence. As Figure 2 illustrates the matching of NBK structures to the formal political structures has enabled women members to gain experience and confidence in a range of internal committees and other informal committees at the local-level, prior to exposing themselves to the rigours of the formal election processes. The critical step that women take to move from the house to the public arena, facilitated by the project through couples training, cultural activities (such as pot songs) and other awareness processes has been fundamental to the success at the bottom-end of the ladder). Although in the 2011 election most women failed to gain general seats, the experience of working in the reserved seats has fuelled their ambition to campaign for positions of power in the next elections (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3: Future plans for control of key political positions by NBK members

Union parishad			Upazilla parishad	
Chairman	General	Reserve	Chair	Vice-chair
16	548 (currently 1)	350 (currently 62)	0	10 (currently 1)

2.2.6 Limitations and recommendations – agency for political engagement

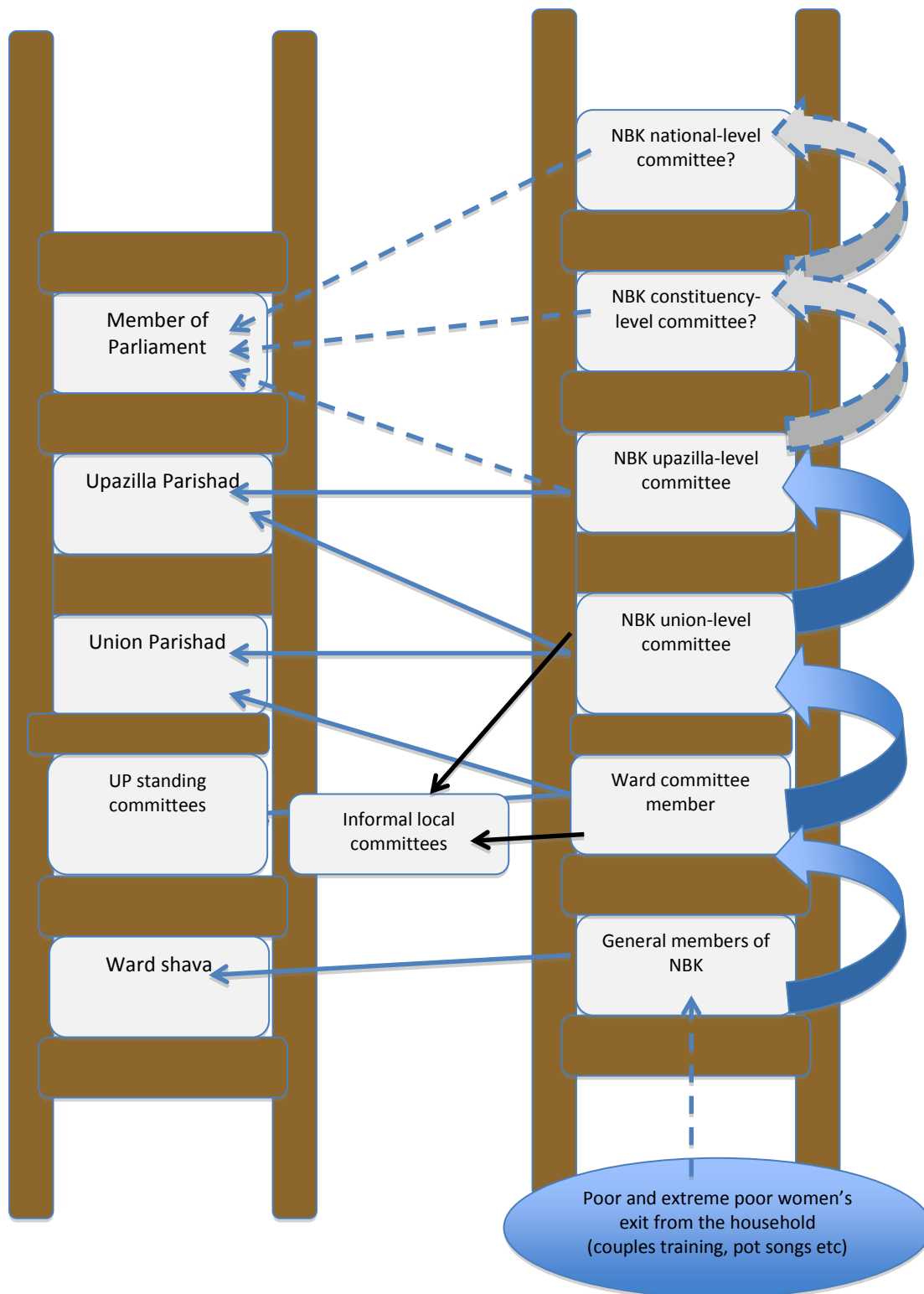
Inadequate post-election support from the project: Despite the success of the political engagement strategies, at the formal level women UP reserved seat members all stated that there was inadequate post-election support to both women and men UP members. There was a very high turnover in UP members in the 2011 election (84% are new) meaning there is limited knowledge of laws, rules, roles and responsibilities amongst all the members. This has led to more difficulties in establishing a more effective voice for women within the general membership. The 3 day training provided by Rupantar was not sufficient to build the level of understanding necessary amongst all the members. This is compounded by the weak position of women reserved seat members, making it difficult for them to demonstrate their effectiveness. For some there was a loss of power compared to their positions as NBK leaders. (Recommendation 5)

Absence of a clear pathway for extreme poor to climb the political ladder: Although the NBKs provide a breeding ground for new political leaders, the barriers to extreme poor reaching up the ladder still remain. In order to ensure in future that equal opportunity is extended to all the potential and actual NBK members to engage in the formal political processes, it will be important to focus carefully on the development of leadership skills of a broad-base of women ensuring that extreme poor women have the opportunities to access these skills. (Recommendation 2)

Recommendation R5: provision of structured support to newly elected women at union and upazilla parishad levels through partnership with other local government programmes

1. For the future development of this women’s empowerment and political engagement model - Rupantar should consider partnering with other local governance programmes that are designed to provide capacity-building support to the union parishads and in particular to women members. Rupantar should proactively engage with other local governance programmes particularly those funded by SDC – SHARIQUE and APARAJITA to look for ways to build synergy between the women’s empowerment and political engagement model supported by Rupantar and the approaches developed by other projects to strengthen local government at union and upazilla level.

Figure 2: Ladder for leadership within the NBK movement and opportunities for formal political engagement



2.3 Outcome 2: LGIs supporting rights and entitlements

*'LGIs supportive to women relevant development, support **rights and entitlements** of women with conducive and inclusive policies'*

Summary achievement: *There is clear evidence of increased responsiveness by UPs, upazilla parishads, government and NGO service providers to support the rights and entitlements of women. Services and budgets indicate increased targeting to extreme poor and poor households based on advocacy by NBKs. NBK members have successfully entered the formal political arena at both union and upazilla level, extending their formal influence into changes in service provision, dispute resolution and assertion of rights.*

2.3.1 Achievements

Tracking of changes in this outcome are more difficult as it requires careful analysis of budget allocations as well as tracking of change in services in response to NBK advocacy. Since the project is not tracking changes in unions where they are not working, it is difficult to attribute the degree of change to the influence of women from the NBKs. The best that can be done is to look at trends over time.

Greater influence over decision-making in informal and formal structures: From discussions with a range of government and civil society actors at upazilla and union level and from assessment of project data there is a clear responsiveness to the advocacy work of the NBKs. Discussions indicate that NBK members are becoming increasingly influential in both formal and informal decision-making structures (Table 4). This is a shift from phase 3 where NBK members were present in a range of committees, but the level of active participation and effective influence was not considered to be as high. This includes presence in union parishad standing committees, ward committees, monthly meetings (where they are held), pre-budget meetings and project implementation committees (see Tables 5&6).

There is evidence (Annual Report 2013:5) that due to the influence of NBK members 18 unions are now operating ward shavas that previously did not. There is also evidence that this presence and active participation is beginning to translate into changes in service provision and respect for rights and entitlements of women. This includes 25,000 people benefiting from a range of decisions that delivered a series of key services for example access to free health treatment, inclusion in VGD and VGF provisions, tube wells and latrines for extreme poor families.

Table 4: Presence of NBK members in key decision-making positions in informal committees

Informal decision-making structures	Executive	Member
School management committee	6	181
Hat/bazaar committee	0	7
Political party	10	0
Religious committee	1	93
Service provider committee/group	1	117
Total	18	398
Source: project monitoring data		

Table 5: Number of former NBK members participating as UP members in formal decision-making processes

Formal decision-making structures	Number of meetings (last 2 years)	Total Number of NBK members attending	Average number of members per meeting
Standing committee	1435	948	1.5

meetings			
Ward committee	424	1586	3.7
Monthly meeting (many of the Unions have not held any meetings)	147	370	2.5
Pre-budget	46	952	20.6
PIC	283	389	1.4
Source: project monitoring data			

Table 6: Number of NBK members participating in decision-making processes in informal committees

Informal decision-making structures	Number of meetings (last 2 years)	Total Number of NBK members attending	Average number of members per meeting
School management committees	849	688	1.2
Political party	73	1697	34.6
Service provider committees/ groups	49	26	1.9
NGO supported committees	431	671	1.6
Religious committees	115	235	2.0
Social committee	175	269	1.5
Source: project monitoring data			

All NBK members consulted during the MTR were committed to increasing their influence and gaining more control over decision-making positions. This is also reflected in the monitoring data collected by the project (Table 7). Comparing this table to the current situation (Table 4) illustrates the levels of ambition held by the NBK leaders where there is little interest in just being an ordinary member and a recognition that authority and power is derived from executive posts. A similar pattern is revealed in Table 3 Showing the plans for future elections to the union parishad.

Table 7: Numbers of NBK members planning to contest places in informal decision-making structures

Informal decision-making structures	Executive	Member
School management committee	413	185
Hat/bazaar committee	76	8
Political party	337	335
Religious committee	209	102
Service provider committee/group	190	59
Total	1225	689
Source: project monitoring data		

Turning influence into changes in budgets and services: There are many ways in which the NBK work has led to improved allocation and targeting of services, the most obvious being the careful targeting of social safety nets to extreme poor women. The high levels of trust in the NBKs has led to significant responsive service provision across productive and non-productive sectors (GO and NGO) in the provision of inputs and training to those people identified by the NBKs. Advocacy and campaigns by the NBKs have led to repairs to embankments that have benefited 35,000 people. The active participation of NBK members particularly in pre-budget discussions in the UP have led to allocations of budget to women and extreme poor. Overall the budget allocations for poor and women have mainly increased since 2009 (Table 8) and in some cases by large amounts. However, as a proportion of the total UP budget there is a declining trend and overall very little money is spent directly on these activities (Table 9).

Table 8: Changes in UP budget allocations since 2009

Upazilla	UP budget (Tk) allocated 2009-2010		UP budget (Tk) allocated 2011-2012		Increase on previous year		UP budget (Tk) allocated 2012-2013		Increase on previous year	
	Poor	Women	Poor	Women	Poor	Women	Poor	Women	Poor	Women
Batiaghata	88,000	71,317	91,160	135,344	3.6%	89.8%	110,000	180,000	20.7%	33.0%
Dacope	63,000	55,000	215,000	248,000	241.3%	350.9%	182,000	300,000	-15.3%	21.0%
Mongla	10,000	11,000	7,000	14,000	-30.0%	27.3%	12,000	21,000	71.4%	50.0%
Rampal	44,714	50,250	87,000	83,625	94.6%	66.4%	93,920	115,586	8.0%	38.2%

Source: project monitoring data

Table 9: % of UP budget allocation to poor and women activities

Upazilla	Percentage of UP budget allocated 2009-2010		Percentage of UP budget allocated 2011-2012		Percentage of UP budget allocated 2012-2013	
	Poor	Women	Poor	Women	Poor	Women
Batiaghata	0.44%	0.35%	0.29%	0.43%	0.26%	0.42%
Dacope	0.42%	0.36%	0.15%	0.17%	0.17%	0.27%
Mongla	0.11%	0.12%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.03%
Rampal	0.21%	0.24%	0.39%	0.37%	0.35%	0.43%

Source: project monitoring data

Watchdog role: the consolidation of NBK women's voices in the UPs and their capacity to network across unions as a result of their NBK connections makes them a more powerful force for change at the local level. With the growing confidence and knowledge of NBK women there are signs of an emerging watchdog role and evidence of NBK members holding public services to account at union and upazilla level. This has included challenge to nepotistic practices in allocation of services to particular households, as well as corruption in infrastructure projects.

2.3.2 Limitations to response

This element of the project is limited in the degree to which it can deliver change as there are fewer opportunities for the project to influence change at this level. Many of the constraints require change at much higher levels of policy and bureaucratic process and are not amenable to change simply by advocacy from NBKs. Despite these limitations however, there are areas in which the project could have been more focused.

The high turnover in **union chairs and members** as previously discussed has led to many limitations in their knowledge of the legal and regulatory frameworks, their roles, and responsibilities. This weakens their capacity to respond to women's voice and in the absence of a structured programme of support, change relies on the understanding the NBK members are able to develop with the union parishad chairs and members.

Risk of patronage politics: at the union level there is a risk that the elected women members see their role only in terms of patronage politics – being able to ensure that services reach the disadvantaged women on the NBK list, rather than understanding their role as representatives of all their constituents, with their mandate for local government derived from this. In conversation with women UP members they clearly see the extreme poor as beneficiaries of their activities and as their vote-bank.

Limitations to effectiveness at upazilla level. Although there are clear changes at union level, it is not yet clear what systematic difference NBKs are having at the upazilla level. There are a series of

barriers to the NBKs at these levels including the highly political and contested relationships between the MP and the upazilla parishad, and the continued uncertainty caused by the incomplete decentralisation to the upazilla parishad. The uncertainty of the distribution of administrative and political power spills over into the difficulties faced by elected women vice-chairs, exemplified by the highly personalised attacks faced by one former NBK member who is now a vice-chair. All this creates a context in which NBKs continue to have to invest significant amounts of time in the development of personalised relationships with individual office-holders in the government agencies in order to ensure that services are provided to those who have rights and entitlements to them. This also reinforces a set of patronage based relationships and runs the risk of solidifying this form of politics at upazilla level as well as union. To increase understanding of the barriers faced by NBKs, Rupantar need to support more systematic analysis of the political and power relationships operating at the upazilla level. This can be used to inform the future strategies for development of NBK actions at this level, including more effective political campaigning in future UZP elections and more effective support to the upazilla parishads and the women elected to vice-chair positions. (Recommendation 6)

Assessing trends and adapting practice: As was discussed in the 2009 MTR, the lack of analytical assessment of changes and trends remains a constraint to project development, and is a particular problem for assessing progress in outcome 2. For example there is no analysis of trends in UP budgets and changes induced as a result of women empowerment activities, compared to unions where there are no project intervention. Trend analysis across a set of indicators would help the project to understand where it is having an effect and where there are areas it needs to strengthen. Another area where further analysis is needed is the turnover in the different tiers of leadership and the development of new leaders. The issue of apparently declining numbers of extreme poor members of NBKs since 2009 is a particular example of such an analysis. This then prompts the project at the level of its strategic direction to question what is happening and whether there are any actions the project needs to take or whether this is the effect of larger contextual changes⁶.

Given this project is entirely based on changes in attitudes and behaviours there is a surprising lack of **perception-based monitoring**. There have been no surveys of perceptions of change in unions inside the groups or outside (amongst service providers, UP members and chairs, citizen committees, recipients of services - extreme poor etc). These surveys are a useful tool to provide evidence for change in behaviours and attitudes. (Recommendation 7)

2.3.3. Recommendations for strengthening results under outcome 2

In summary, the project is on track to deliver what it set out to achieve for outcome 2 and can demonstrate good progress for each of its indicators. The comments and recommendations provided by the MTR are to help the project deepen its analysis and help it to really understand what changes can be attributed to the project's influence as opposed to wider changes in the political, social and economic context. The recommendations also provide a basis for further development of the interface between NBKs as a social movement and the incorporation of gender equity concerns into the upazilla parishads.

⁶ In this particular case the MTR asked for clarifications from the project, after discussion with field staff several reasons emerged for this apparent decline including the after effects of the two major cyclones which led to a large influx of aid targeted in particular to extreme poor households. Post disaster there have been a series of major donor funded livelihood security projects for the extreme poor in the Sundarbans areas (which covers the 4 project upazillas). These projects have already had an impact by reducing the numbers of extreme poor in the project area, this is reflected in these figures. The second reason arises from the presence of ruling party parliamentarians in the area with access to enhanced numbers of safety net services which are used to increase vote banks as an important strategy of any party in power.

Recommendation R6: understanding the underlying power dynamics at the upazilla level

The fundamental challenge that must be addressed by the NBKs and Rupantar is how to ensure that the NBKs do not themselves become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women's voice where women themselves are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons. This could include increased work to support the emerging watchdog role, to develop the social accountability skills of the NBKs

1. Rupantar needs to initiate a series of discussions with UP women members and the NBK leaders operating at ward, union and upazilla level to reflect on the ways in which they interact with their members and their constituents and to look for ways to reduce the risk of introducing patronage based political processes
2. Rupantar should initiate a series of discussions with the field staff and NBK members to understand the power dynamics at upazilla level and strategise how to develop the capacity and effectiveness of NBK actions both through the upazilla coordinating committee, as well as through wider campaigning.
3. In future programming, Rupantar should consider how it can build on the emerging watchdog role of NBKs and use its experience from the USAID funded PROGATI to support the social accountability skills of the NBKs
4. In future programming Rupantar should consider how it can partner with other organisations supporting the development of upazilla parishads to strengthen the role of women vice-chairs and to identify ways in which to mobilise the women's movement to promote gender equity concerns at the upazilla level.

Recommendation R7: learning to understand what works

Although the OD process is focusing on these issues of learning - the MTR strongly recommends that Rupantar invests in understanding the trends and the reasons underlying some of the changes noted in this MTR during the last few months of this phase of the project. This should include:

- Trend-tracking changes – e.g. budget tracking to understand shifts in budgets, allocations to poor, women, marginal groups etc., compared to unions where the project does not operate
- Analysis of key indicators such as the level of recruitment of new leaders to NBK leadership positions, including analysis of their well-being status (extreme poor, poor etc)
- 'Satisfaction surveys' of demand-side to get a sense of breadth and depth of change in understanding and response (particularly important to survey extreme poor members and non-members)

2.4 Outcome 3: organisational development of Rupantar

*Rupantar's organisational set up based on a clearly defined **strategic plan**; management efficient and results oriented (the MTR team assessed **progress** towards delivery of this outcome, as the organisational development work is still underway*

2.4.1 Achievements, limitations and recommendations

Summary achievement: *The OD process is currently on-track with its proposed activities, but it will not be possible to assess the effectiveness of the process until the strategic plan is developed and the consequent restructuring around a programmatic approach is achieved. At this stage it is clear there is a lot of support for the process internally and a clear understanding at each level of the organization of the purpose of the OD process*

The MTR assessed the organisational development process through a series of structured discussions with the whole of senior management, all the field staff for the Grassroots Women Leadership project, individual interviews with head-quarter staff and discussions with the executive committee and general body. This was complemented by discussions at the beginning and end of the MTR with the consultants (Verulam Associates Ltd.) supporting the OD process (see Annex 11).

What is clear from all of these discussions is the **strong ownership by Rupantar** over the process and content (Annex 10). There is active participation at all levels of the organisation with a clear sense of shared understanding of the direction of the changes in Rupantar expressed from field staff to senior management and the governing body. One of the strongest achievements of the process supported by Verulam Associates is that staff are learning what organisational development means by doing it, at the same time they are building their own capacity and skills. This is a strong achievement of the support and very different from other OD support that Rupantar have experienced where processes were not internalised or understood by staff. From a review of the OD plan it is clear it is on track to deliver on all of the major tasks by the end of the year

The **skilled facilitation and mentoring by the Verulam team** have inspired confidence inside Rupantar to take challenging decisions. This includes reform of the different sister organisations and their merger into one organisation under one umbrella, as well as changes to their governance structures at executive director level.

Despite these achievements there are some significant challenges facing Rupantar. Rupantar has grown from a **small highly personalised organisation to a large complex structure** with unclear systems and processes. The OD process is slowly resolving these issues but it will take time to put in place the new structures and systems necessary to make Rupantar fit for the current context. This requires urgent attention to seeking funding as there will be a major budget short-fall if new programmes are not identified. This requires senior management to be proactive in discussing with priority donors possible areas for programmatic support.

One of the biggest challenges for Rupantar is making the shift from highly projectised structures to a programmatic approach. A programme approach requires different types of skills and capabilities and there are questions about whether the existing staff have the capabilities to make the shift from single project management to thematic and multiple project management.

A programme-based organisation will require **different styles of management** from that currently used. When talking to staff it is clear that there are high levels of access to the executive directors which is a great strength of the organisation, but it also is a weakness as it prevents the downward movement of authority to appropriate levels and the development of management skills at lower levels. Under the new programmatic approach it will be essential to move to a more **strategic approach to management with dispersed authority** to middle and lower level managers.

As Rupantar moves away from a highly silo-based and project-oriented organisation, it will be critical to use this opportunity to build **new systems for knowledge management and learning**. For staff this will require a significant amount of attitude and behaviour change as well as new skills. It will require an openness to challenge from other staff and to learning from practice within and across programmatic areas. Staff will have to shift from being collectors of data to the owners of the data and understanding why they are doing things in a particular way, with the capacity to reflect and change practice, based on analysis of trends and changes. Currently as discussed for the Grass-roots Women Leaders' project these capacities are still very under developed and are in fact hindering the

progress of the project. It is time now for Rupantar to consider how to increase its research capacity skills so some of these key analytical questions can be identified and addressed by Rupantar.

Meshing the existing organisational structure and values with new organisational structures will require careful facilitation to maintain the balance between the strengths of the 'old Rupantar' based on a strong culture and values with the more formal structures that are required by an organisation of this size that is going to be able to survive in the current financial and political context. Changing the form of Rupantar implies a degree of restructuring that will require tough decisions on staffing. This will be the first real test of Rupantar and its capacity to retain its culture of 'family' values but at the same time ensure that it has the staffing and skills fit to meet the demanding context in which NGOs have to operate. It is imperative that all staff including field staff have the necessary skills and understanding to support the work of a rights-based organisation. This will mean that it will not be possible to transfer staff from one part of Rupantar to another without ensuring they have the right skills to do the work that is required.

All the changes implied by the OD process do have significant **financial, time and human resource costs**. These are recognised by Rupantar and have had some effects on activities in their field programmes. However, it is clear from discussions that staff feel the benefits of the changes are going to far outweigh the costs. However, it will be important for Rupantar senior management to demonstrate quickly that the OD process is bringing benefits by ensuring they are proactive in seeking new funders and able to demonstrate the capacity to get funding for a programmatic approach as opposed to multiple projects.

To implement the full **transition from a projectised to programmatic organisation** will take time and money. There will be a need for money to support the transition from the old Rupantar to the new. Rupantar with Verulam should start to cost out a transition plan so this can be part of the approach to donors (costs for immediate changes, medium-term etc).

Recommendation R8: organisational development issues

Verulam Associates are supporting a strong process of organisational development in Rupantar. At this stage it is difficult to assess the content outcome of this process as the key element the strategic plan is still to be developed. However, the MTR team have full confidence in the work of the consultants.

There are three main areas of concern that the team would like to highlight:

1. It is imperative that Rupantar senior management proactively engage with existing and new funders to discuss the progress they are making in the organisational changes as well as the thematic content for a new programmatic approach. This engagement must be in place in May 2013, as the time is very short to ensure there is funding in place for future work, particularly on developing the work on women's empowerment. There is a high risk of a major budget short-fall across the whole organisation.
2. The second area concerns the future costs of managing the transition from the old Rupantar to a new programmatic based organisation. The MTR recommends that Rupantar with support from Verulam produces a costed plan for this transition period as soon as it is possible (i.e. after agreement on the strategic plan) to ensure that this can be factored into discussions with future donors in the next few months.
3. The third area concerns Rupantar's ability to attract the right types of staff with the levels of analytical and strategic experience necessary to move Rupantar from a projectised organisation to a programmatic organisation. This will include particular efforts to build up the monitoring and research functions of the organisation. The MTR is confident that this will be addressed in

the OD process, but considers it a very high risk if it is not addressed properly for the future effective functioning of Rupantar

3. Progress to date and actions to be taken before end of phase 4

Summary

Progress to achieving outcomes and impact	Comments
Outcome 1 - project is on track to deliver on outcome 1	NBKs are definitely working as agencies of rural women, particularly the poor - there are questions about the strength of the organisation particularly its internal decision-making structures, and mechanisms for leadership graduation
Outcome 2 – project is on track to deliver what it set out to achieve	Evidence of local government institutions responding with relevant services and budget allocations. There are questions about the use of NBKs as service delivery ‘arms’ of GO and NGO providers.
Outcome 3 - project is on track to deliver what it set out to achieve	Rupantar is on track to deliver its organisational outcomes by the end of 2013. There are questions about how Rupantar is to fund and manage the transition from old to new Rupantar and the speed of implementation
Impact	There is already evidence of improved access to services by poorest women. What is not as clear is the degree to which the poorest are able to claim their own rights and entitlements as opposed to others advocating on their behalf.

3.1 Actions to be taken before end of phase 4

Despite the achievements to date, the MTR considers that there are important areas of work that need to be undertaken prior to the end of this phase in order to position Rupantar to further strengthen its women empowerment model and use it as the basis for future programming. These areas of work are described in the recommendations (R1-8). The following list of detailed actions should also be incorporated into an action plan to be completed during the final months of this phase:

1. Review internal governance mechanisms of NBK and higher level structures

- Develop **clear strategy for replacing leadership** at all levels (ward, union, upazilla) (fixed term and fixed number of terms)
- Clarify and test processes for building **leadership capacity of extreme poor**
- Identify ways to **dissolve boundaries** between old ‘45’ general members and existing new general members
- **Review internal decision-making processes** and propose mechanisms to strengthen democratic basis
- **Review internal feedback mechanisms** – union to ward, ward to general members and propose methods to strengthen
- **Review level of funding** required to maintain NBKs as agencies of political empowerment (and not as service deliverers or providers of financial services to members)
- Develop proposal for **second generation support** to NBKs, based on reviews,

2. Develop the conceptual basis for the women's empowerment model

- Identify key elements of **women's empowerment model** to guide replication in other geographical areas and to guide development of other programmatic areas of Rupantar's work (rural, urban and climate change governance)
 - Define key stages of developing an independent NBK including expected time-frame for each stage
 - Define indicators that can be used to assess progression to next stage
 - Define level and type of support required for each stage
 - Define process of exit from support to NBK (post-registration)
 - Incorporate the information gained from the work in activities 1, 3 and 4 (outlined in this section) to improve the analysis of what works best for the future development of the women's empowerment model

3. Monitoring issues and planning for new programme

- **Include new logframe indicators** to capture data (already collected but not analysed) on leadership renewal, class of leader (extreme poor, poor)
- **Collect life histories** of x number of extreme poor (members, non-members receiving services, and non-members not receiving services) to understand qualitative changes induced by project
- **Compare three similar unions** (social and economic condition)– one with NBK, one neighbouring union without NBK, one distant union to a) assess whether there is any spread effect of project supported changes and b) look at the without project scenario
- **Check utility of baseline survey:** the baseline is currently not useable as it does not differentiate between the key groups. The MTR asked Rupantar to look at the basic data to see if it can be used to differentiate between these groups. This is currently being checked by the project. Depending on the answer it may be possible to use the baseline to look at the impacts of this phase of the project on women's livelihoods. If it is not possible then the project will have to use whatever data are available from previous phases to assess trends and the life histories of different types of members and non-members.
- **Value for money:** Use unit costs of formation of 1 NBK to develop a value for money model to include in overall NBK model
- **Checking assumptions** – develop a small study (to be undertaken by Rupantar staff) to look at effects of extreme poor women empowerment on their husbands: does the empowerment of women increase their husbands' status and voice or does it lead to increased marginalisation. Is this women's focused approach to developing empowered leadership excluding extreme poor men and further marginalising them?
- **Mapping of existing local governance initiatives** and opportunities for NBK and elected women UP member linkage - e.g. UNUF, upazilla and union associations, women's wings in political parties to ensure added value and not duplication of the efforts of other projects and programmes such as LGSP, APARAJITA, SDLG
- **Mapping of existing livelihood service providers** NGO and GO – to ensure there is an adequate information base for starting work in new areas

4. Addressing risks in preparation for using women empowerment model as the basis for future programming. Rupantar needs to assess these risks and indicate how they are going to respond to them. They should incorporate their responses to these risks into the action plan to be agreed with SDC.

- **Citizens or beneficiaries?** Risk of NBKs moving from organisations developing voice and agency of poor and extreme poor as **citizens** to service delivery organisations serving members as **beneficiaries**

- **Building higher-level structures before the foundations are sound:** risk of domination of division-level committee by influential urban-based voices driving agendas of rural poor and extreme poor
- **Abuse of mass mobilisation capacity** by powerful, influential stakeholders
- Failure to maintain identity as **women’s political empowerment movement** and risk of change to **women’s development organisations** and solidifying patronage politics both inside the NBK and also through NBK women leaders elected to the union parishad and upazilla parishads
- **There is an on-going risk that Rupantar fails to build systematically on good practice from other Rupantar experience to strengthen and deepen model of women empowerment:** e.g. using citizen committees (developed under USAID), experience from urban governance etc.

Recommendation R9: Action plan for these 4 areas of immediate activity

Rupantar needs to put in place an action plan to address these four areas of detailed short-term recommendations

1. review of internal governance processes of NBKs
2. develop the conceptual basis for the women empowerment and political engagement model
3. address the monitoring issues
4. address the risks outlined with a response indicating how they are to be addressed

Recommendation R10: Agreed action plan to respond to recommendations of MTR

Rupantar needs to put in place an action plan, agreed with SDC, to address recommendations 1-8 and 11. The action plan should detail activities to be carried out to fulfil the recommendations with a time-line and responsibility for ensuring the work is done. Annex 5 lists the recommendations, the priority and responsibility.

4. Conceptual base for women’s empowerment programming

“if we can change our families, we can change society and we can change our country ...change starts when we move from our house...freedom of expression is the main thing.” (NBK member)

4.1 The MTR understanding of the conceptual framework – 2nd generation

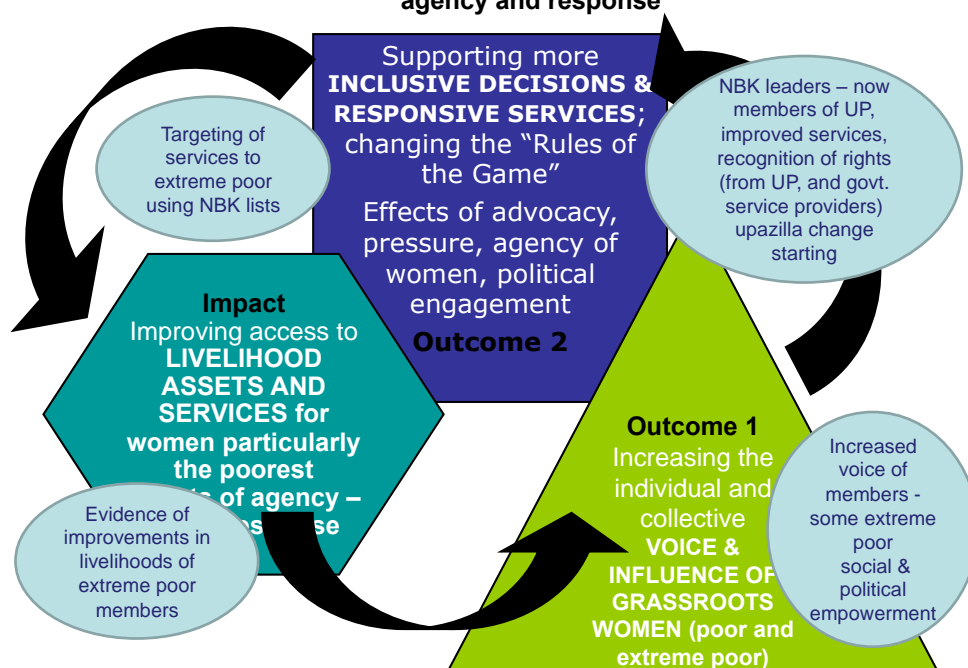
Building on the last MTR and the conceptual framework presented there we have looked at the areas of change in this phase and the emergence of second generation issues. Figure 3 summarises the changes detailed in previous sections and helps to identify the key elements of the model that Rupantar have been following for women’s empowerment and political engagement.

In a recent case study of Rupantar’s approach to women’s empowerment Brocklesby (2013:5) outlines the theory of change based on four key interlinked assumptions. These assumptions underlie the relationships illustrated in Figure 3. Together they provide the basis for the conceptual model that can be further developed in future programming:

1. Progress towards gender equality is driven by women’s empowerment
2. Agency and voice are instrumental in empowering women and progressing gender equality. Women’s agency affects their capabilities to build up their social networks, strengthen their human capital and take advantage of economic opportunities. Women’s abilities to raise their voice together to make choices and decisions, for example in determining local development priorities or challenging gender-based violence have the potential to transform gender relations and by extension society

3. Awareness raising about gender equality, gender justice and the rights of women needs to be directed at men as well as at women at all levels; in the household, in the community and within government systems and structures. Working with women alone will not change the unequal power relationships which maintain inequalities and discrimination against women.
4. Only when women become their own advocates for change within the political systems and processes of government, can gender equality be reached and sustained

Figure 3: Summary of changes– outcomes and impact – for building voice, agency and response



A key element of the model for women's empowerment has been the work the project has developed to increase the involvement of extreme poor women. Since the last MTR, Rupantar have developed a more systematic approach to understanding and identifying the extreme poor. This has resulted in improvements in the targeting of services to the extreme poor – both members and non-members, and critically brought new poor and extreme poor women into the NBKs (Figure 4).

As part of building a model of women's empowerment, it is important to understand the foundations of women's empowerment – i.e. who are the people who are being empowered? We revisited the work started in the 2009 MTR and considered how Rupantar has operationalized an understanding of extreme poverty. Compared to the findings from the last MTR, this time Rupantar and its field staff, and the NBK members all have a clear understanding of extreme poverty and the ways in which the NBK members can engage with these issues and begin to make a difference to extreme poor women. This understanding of how to include extreme poor will be further deepened by the work to be completed before the end of phase 4.

Critically the changes start at household level and enable the women to make the major move from the private to public space through building understanding and acceptance inside the house. The use of activities such as couples training and pot songs are key to removing the barriers for women's mobility outside the home. The areas of weakness illustrated by dotted lines indicate areas where Rupantar need to look for means to improve the access of extreme poor and adolescent girls

(currently exiting from the adolescent groups) to membership of the NBKs, as part of building a second and third tier succession plan for leaders.

Figure 4: Unpacking the ‘women leaders’ in the poverty continuum

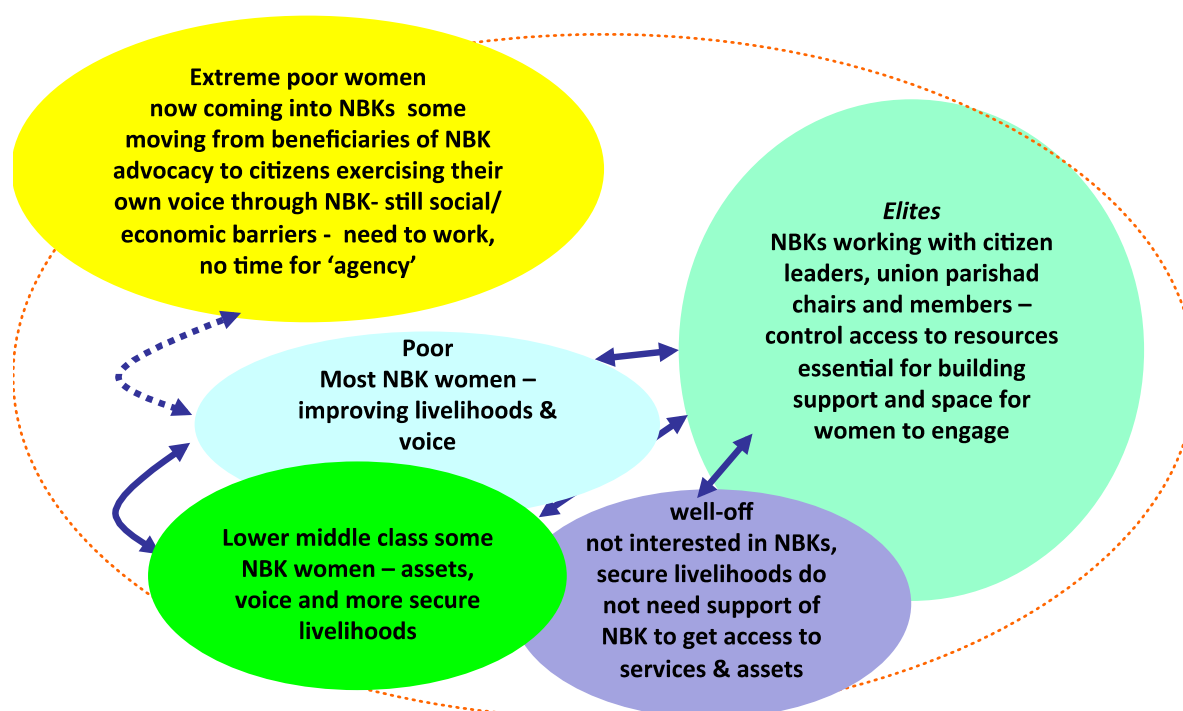
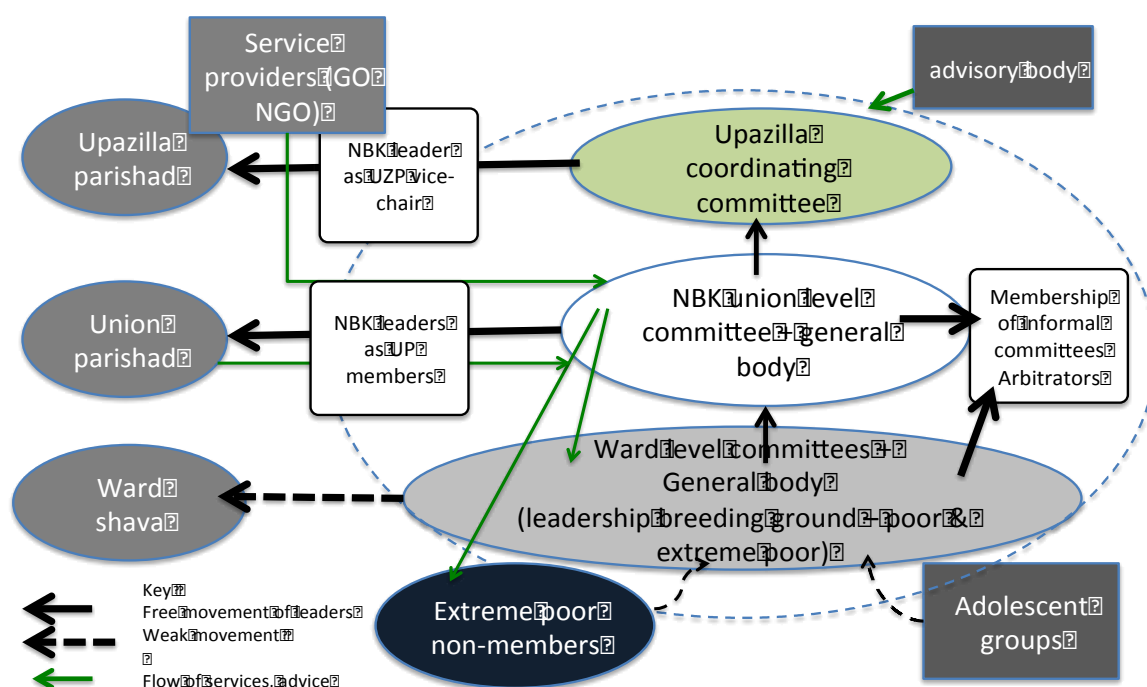


Table 10: key stages of women’s empowerment - building voice and agency

Key stages of women’s empowerment	Activities
<i>Stage 1: moving outside the house From private to public space</i>	Couples training, pot-songs, demonstration from neighbour and friends that it is possible to move outside the household
<i>Stage 2: learning how to have agency - joining the NBK</i>	Involvement in courtyard meetings Leading courtyard meetings Engaging in campaigns Feeling the security of solidarity from membership of NBK
<i>Stage 3: building voice and agency inside the NBK</i>	Selection/election to ward committee Advocating on behalf of other women Arbitrating in local disputes
<i>Stage 4: capitalising on voice and agency - moving into informal & formal political space</i>	Winning executive positions on informal committees Campaigning in union and upazilla parishad elections Winning seats and becoming an effective decision-maker

Figure 5 Women Empowerment Conceptual Model



As the review has highlighted there are now a number of key **second generation** issues that the NBKs and Rupantar need to address for the further development and strengthening of the model. To summarise these are:

1. strengthening the internal governance and democratic processes of the NBKs
2. ensuring mechanisms for leadership development and replacement (and ensuring there is fair access to leadership opportunities for more disadvantaged women from extreme poor households)
3. clarifying and strengthening the shared vision of the objectives of the NBKs between members and leaders
4. supporting the NBKs to ensure they do not become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women's voice where women themselves are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons.

4.2 Assessing the programmatic opportunities

The MTR as part of its TORs was asked to assess the programmatic opportunities for further developing the women empowerment and political engagement model based on the results thus far. The team considered three options derived from discussions with SDC and Rupantar staff, we also asked NBK member and leaders for their views on how the model could be developed.

1. Expanding model of women's empowerment and political engagement across more parliamentary constituencies in Khulna Division

2. Deepening and increasing political ladder of women's empowerment (second generation support)
3. Partner with Aparajita and provide 'breeding ground' model for women's empowerment and potential elected women leaders

It was clear to the MTR team that these three options are not exclusive, but that all three need to be brought together in one process. The features of the new programme combine several important elements (these are derived from ideas from Rupantar, the MTR team and the NBK members):

Features of new programme for women's empowerment and political engagement

Key elements of programme	Specific detail
Building on strengths of Rupantar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on Rupantar's core competence - respected and well-networked regional NGO with trusted local rights-based partner NGOs • Opportunity to build model using other strengths of Rupantar – cultural activism and experience in governance (urban and rural) • Good entry points to many other districts in the area due to previous experience in support to local government (under USAID project) and other project work
Building synergy with other local governance programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the application of the women's empowerment model to neighbouring districts allows Rupantar to develop a phased partnership with other local governance programmes operating in these areas (e.g. APARAJITA) • Opportunity for learning and strengthening of approaches for Rupantar and Aparajita • Upward linkages to policy advocacy: APARAJITA provides upward linkage to national policy processes and advocacy
Building credibility of model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of model in new districts and capacity to build political empowerment and engagement with streamlined support • Critical mass of empowered women in 27 upazillas and 15 parliamentary constituencies in one division • Expansion to new areas will demonstrate credibility of approach and applicability to other areas of Bangladesh
Deepening political engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to explore and develop interface with political parties • Opportunity to deepen political engagement - broaden base to include extreme poor in leadership processes
Strengthening voice and agency of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to combine skills of existing NBK leaders and Rupantar partner NGOs to transfer approach to other districts in Khulna Division through peer-to-peer learning. • Extend NBK interfaces with existing local government institutions including LG associations • Extend political ladder upwards focused attention to upazilla political leadership and parliamentary constituency and downwards more rungs at lower level to ensure extreme poor can climb up • Higher national profile for the approach to women's empowerment and building capacity for NBKs to have own voice at national level to advocate and influence national policy processes • Moment of extreme political fragility in Bangladesh and threat to women's empowerment and independence – an important moment to strengthen grassroots women and build a social and political movement
Phased spread of model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the existing project area for further testing and deepening of approach to include developing mechanisms for social accountability and transparency • Increasing upward reach of NBKs to influence national policy processes (focused

	<p>on local government reforms to women's political leadership)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Rupantar support to an additional 4 neighbouring districts • Partnership with local rights-based organisations to extend to a further 6 districts using existing skilled staff and NBK leaders
Testing out approach in areas with different vulnerabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme climate vulnerability – testing out climate resilient governance. The proposed area covers a range of different disaster event types such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the cyclone belt of Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira, 2. flood and water-logging in Jessore, Satkhira, Narail, Kushtia, Magura; 3. river erosion in Norail and Kushtia, 4. drought in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Jhenaidah. • High levels of social and economic vulnerability: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Border area districts of Khulna Division (Satkhira, Jessore, Meherpur, Chuadanga and Kushtia) identified as high risk for women and children – particular issues of trafficking, violence against women and children, domestic violence and high rates of suicide amongst women 2. The proposed constituencies also have a higher than national average % of extreme poor, and high rates of internal migration

Recommendation R11: Developing the model for women's empowerment and political engagement as the basis for Rupantar's future programmatic work

The team recommends that Rupantar consider the phased expansion of the women's empowerment model as the basis for future Rupantar programming this should be based on the following actions:

1. Incorporation into the development of the women's empowerment model the recommended 4 areas of detailed activity outlined in section 3.1 including internal governance and the political space for engagement of NBKs at the upazilla level
2. Clear development of mechanisms for building the political ladder at the bottom end so extreme poor women can access leadership opportunities as well as more careful consideration to how women are to be supported at the higher ends of the ladder.
3. Discuss and share approaches to women's empowerment with APARAJITA and build areas of potential common work
4. Consideration of how this model could be used to build more climate resilient agency of poor and extreme poor women

5. Conclusions

Rupantar is going through a major organisational development process that is going to lead to extensive structural change. By the end of 2013 the degree to which these changes have been embedded will be clear, but currently it is on track with evidence of high degrees of commitment and support to the changes. It is important that Rupantar complete this transformation as quickly as possible with the implementation of new systems, structures, staffing and skills in place in a short transition phase. If the phase is too long and the transformation incomplete it will destabilise the organisation. Once these changes are in place Rupantar will be strongly placed to continue to support and help to develop the movement of poor and extreme poor women across the south-west of Bangladesh.

“We are now starting the path of a programmatic approach – to harmonise our ideas and link across processes, before we just coordinated across projects but there was no critical discussion of whether it was a programme. Before the OD process started I could only say this was the result of the SDC project or the Asia Foundation project, now by the end of the OD process I will be able say this is Rupantar’s result.” (Rupantar staff member)

Rupantar has demonstrated that the NBKs are a robust model of women’s empowerment and political engagement that continue to develop women’s agency and voice. The approach is both highly relevant to the current political context as well as effective. It is already able to demonstrate contribution to its goal through direct impacts on 5,000 extreme poor women’s livelihoods through their access to safety net services and an increase in access to assets for at least 80,000 poor women and men through better targeting of a range of training and services.

A new breed of political leaders is emerging that are not part of the existing political patronage networks. They have a deep understanding of the rights and entitlements of women and disadvantaged people and the capacity to influence allocation decisions to ensure services and assets match these rights. The NBKs are now at a critical juncture as they develop as independent organisations making decisions about their future direction. The fundamental challenge that must be addressed by the NBKs and Rupantar is how to ensure that the NBKs do not themselves become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women’s voice where women themselves are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons.

‘I was a housewife before I became a member of the NBK. I started at ward-level, then union and upazilla coordination committee. Now I am on the divisional committee and I even sit on Rupantar’s general body. I come from an area where it is 95% controlled by the Jamat-i-Islam, most women wear burkas. I have access to district and national-level people and events. I am also surprised how it is I came to be here, but it is because I am a member of the NBK!’ (prominent leader of the NBK)

Documents Consulted

Project documents

Rupantar 2011 Baseline report on grassroots women's leadership phase 4. Rupantar, Khulna
Rupantar 2012 Grassroots women's leadership annual report (2011-2012). Rupantar, Khulna
Rupantar 2013 Grassroots women's leadership annual report (2012-2013). Rupantar, Khulna
Rupantar 2011 Half-yearly operational report February to July 2011. Rupantar, Khulna
Rupantar 2012 Biannual operational report February to July 2012. Rupantar, Khulna
Rupantar 2010 A framework for organisational development of Rupantar.

Verulam Associates Ltd

Various mission notes and reports

Verulam Associates Ltd 2012 Technical assistance to organisational development support of Rupantar: September-October 2012. Verulam Associates Ltd, Dhaka

Verulam Associates Ltd 2012 Technical assistance to organisational development support of Rupantar: November 2012- January 2013. Verulam Associates Ltd, Dhaka

Other reports

Boex, J, Lahiri, S and Thevoz, L 2012 SDC local governance portfolio strategy review: a review of local governance in Bangladesh and implications for SDC. SDC, Dhaka.

Brocklesby MA 2013 Promoting gender equality through women's political empowerment, a case study of Rupantar, Bangladesh. SCO – Bangladesh Partners' Gender Platform, Dhaka

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation 2012 Strengthening local governance in Bangladesh: lessons of practical experience SDC local governance programme – SHARIQUE. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Dhaka.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

Terms of references

Contract no. 81017447 (Mandate type B)
Mid Term Review 2013 of Rupantar, Phase 4

1. Background

Rupantar which means transformation was established as a cultural organization in 1992 and started to work as a development organization (NGO) in the South West part of the country (Khulna) since 1995. Rupantar bases its work in the credo that culture and sustainable development are closely connected. The particularity (and uniqueness) of their approach is the promotion of people's development through sensitization and awareness campaign on specific issues using folk culture and other traditional means (such as folk songs, drama), well adapted in their intervention areas. Rupantar's vision is to establish a gender equitable democratic society with cultural values, free from injustice and superstition.

The partnership with SDC started in 1998, and rehearsed in four subsequent phases⁷. With SDC's support Rupantar has trained rural women as 'women leaders' and facilitated the formation of women's organizations as a medium for social and political change at the local level. The core focus of the current phase of the project is the consolidation of the women leadership organizations, as well as dissemination and replication of Rupantar's experience. The overall objective is 'to promote and facilitate active participation of grassroots rural women in local decision making process that contributes to improved living conditions for the women and members of their communities, especially the poor'. Under the project, Rupantar is working in 32 Union Parishads in Bagerhat and Khulna district in Bangladesh.

The concept of 'women to women coaching and peer learning' is also introduced to promote transfer of knowledge and experience among the women. Till date, 288 Women Committees (WCs at ward level, 96 Women Coordination Committees (WCCs) at greater ward level (constituency of women U.P member), 32 Union Coordination Committees (UCC) at Union Parishad level and 04 Upazilla Coordination Committees (UzCC) at Upazilla Parishad level formed with around 20,000 rural women.

Since mid August 2012, the SDC is also supporting the organizational Development of Rupantar, by Verulam Associates Ltd.

2. Major objectives of the MTR

The expected results as defined in the proposal of Grassroots Women's leadership (phase 4) project with duration from February 2011 to January 2014 forms the basis of this review.

The objectives and the responsibilities of the Mid Term Review (MTR) are to:

⁷ (Phase 1: Oct 1998-March 2004, Phase 2: April 2004-June 2007, Phase 3: July 2007- October 2010 and Phase 4:2011-2014)

Objectives	Areas of consultant Responsibility	
	Mary Hobley	Amita Dey
To review the progress towards achieving objectives and expected outcomes and provide recommendations for enhancing relevance, effectiveness and sustainability within the current project phase.	MH to lead on writing these elements Joint inputs to the text	
To analyze and review the institutional development progresses made by Rupantar, in terms of the overall programmatic strategies and approaches, knowledge management and result oriented monitoring, donors' coordination issues and core institutional policies and structures.	MH to lead on this objective	AD to contribute
To assess the programmatic opportunities of Rupantar given the results achieved so far and changing context locally and nationally, and provide a conceptual base for future Rupantar' interventions in the area of women empowerment and women leaderships processes.	MH to have overall responsibility to lead on assessment with key contributions from AD	AD to lead on assessing and developing the conceptual base for Rupantar's future interventions on women's empowerment, informed by contextual analysis of changing local and national conditions
Activities: Desk review of relevant documents Rupantar and SDC to provide relevant documents before week beginning 15 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MH and AD to devise agreed fieldwork protocol draft during week beginning 15 April • AD to source other relevant material from the wider Bangladeshi literature and synthesize key points arising 	

3. Review process, Methodology and timeframe

3.1 Composition of the review team:

A team of two external consultants (one international: the contractor, and one national, covered by a separate contract) will carry out the MTR. Besides having a positive track record of conducting such reviews (specifically with Rupantar) the team members have expertise on gender, women's empowerment, organizational capacity building and local governance in Bangladesh. The consultants are well versed in participatory approaches to information collection and the analysis of such information.

3.2 Period of the review:

The timeframe for the MTR mission is from 15 April – 30 May 2013.

3.3 Review activities:

- 0 Review relevant documents including previous MTRs reports, Project document and its annexes, publications and reports from Rupantar and other relevant recent documentation in the area of women leadership in Bangladesh.
- 1 Conduct interviews with Rupantar staff, senior management, board members, DPs and other key stakeholders including (and more importantly) primary beneficiaries.
- 2 Organize focus group / brainstorming discussions as relevant

Time Allocations

The proposed time planning for the MTR team is as follows:

Steps	Method	International Consultant: the Contractor	Local Consultant
Program	Desk Study	3	3
Design and Methodology Development	Traveling to Dhaka	1	-
	Briefing SDC and Rupantar	1	1
Mid Term Review Conduction	Field Visit (project intervention areas)	4	4
	Institutional analysis (Khulna)	2	2
	Meeting with partners (Dhaka)	2	2
De-briefing and travelling back	De-briefing with SDC and other Donors	1	1
	Traveling back	1	-
Final Report	Finalization of Report writing	4	2
Total Days		19	15

A timetable for the consultants will be developed in due time.

4. Deliverables

- A technical answer to the Term of References upon receiving the ToRs and relevant background documentation.
- A debriefing at the end of the assignment to present and discuss the findings, recommendations etc. with Rupantar and SDC program staff and possible other stakeholders / key persons. The debriefing shall include a PPT presentation following the structure of the future mission report.
- A draft report (softcopy, max 20 pages excluding annexes) with an executive summary (2 pages) recommendations for the current phase and in the longer term.
- A final report (softcopy, max 20 pages excluding annexes) with an executive summary (2 pages), recommendations and Annexes.

5. Reporting

The consultants will be collectively reportable to SDC. However, all reports and documents prepared during the assignment will be treated as the property of SDC. The reports and or

documents or any part, therefore, cannot be sold, used /shared and reproduced in any manner without prior approval of SDC.

6. Administration and Coordination

Rupantar will assist the consultants in:

- Briefing, planning and debriefing discussions and developing plans for field trips and review activities
- Providing relevant written materials/documents/reports
- Providing sufficient time of its programmatic staff and human resources
- Providing necessary logistic support as necessary
- Making necessary contacts with stakeholders and field visits.

Rupantar will provide the logistics support including arranging field visits, etc for the review team.

7. Documents to be provided to MTR team

- Project document and implementation reports
- Previous MTR Reports, M & E Tools and reports
- Various guidelines and manuals as developed by Rupantar
- Various publications of Rupantar
- Cooperation Strategy Bangladesh 2008-2012 / Strategic documents of SDC, including documents on APARAJITA project .

8. Budget

The review team will be contracted to SDC and the consultants fees will be defined as per SDC norms and criteria. In addition, they will be paid the daily flat rate for accommodation and subsistence and they will be paid for transport costs. The consultants are expected to settle their own accommodation bills and airfare, to be reimbursed upon presentation of the original bills only. Details of the budget will be part of this Terms of Reference, based on final agreements between SDC and the consultants.

Annex 2 MTR methods and people met

A2.1 MTR methods

The team met with over 260 women and men (members and non members of NBKs), ward committee leaders, Union Coordination Committee leaders, Upazilla Coordination Committee and Division-level Coordination Committee. We purposively selected a range of unions to represent different time-frames of support (from the oldest (15) years, to those formed during the second phase (9 years) to those currently formed (6 years) to consider issues of organisational strength (particularly internal governance) and also to look at the effectiveness of post-registration support from Rupantar and mechanisms for strengthening the NBKs. These meetings focused on the changes the women themselves perceived, with a range of questions to elicit what these changes were both within the household and within their wider communities. We focused particularly on possible future directions, to inform our recommendations for the further development and expansion of the approach beyond these 32 unions. We focused in particular on changes in response in terms of the services obtained from the union parishads and upazilla line department service providers and the degree to which there was evidence of sustained social and political agency. We also attempted to track changes at goal-level in terms of improved living conditions for the poor.

We held separate meetings with union parishads – chairs and elected male and female members and with a group of male citizen leaders. In these discussions we were interested in evidence of change from their perspective, and attitudes and behaviours towards these changes. In addition we met separately with project field staff, area office staff and senior management staff; and had a series of extensive bilateral discussions with senior management during our journeys to and from the unions.

To assess the progress internally of Rupantar’s organisational development, we held a whole-day meeting at the start of our mission with senior management and a series of individual interviews with staff to follow-up on key issues. This was complemented by discussion at the beginning and end of the MTR mission with Verula Associates Ltd, the consultant group supporting the OD process inside Rupantar. This provided an additional opportunity to identify key issues and to cross-check our findings at the end of the mission.

An open reflection/discussion session was held with the Khulna-based Rupantar staff (drawn from across the organisation) to cross-check findings and gain greater clarity on certain issues. This was repeated at national-level with a debriefing with SDC advisers responsible for the project (see Annex 3 for mission itinerary).

National-level discussions were held with two other programmes working with local government issues in the same geographical area as Rupantar’s work: the USAID funded SDLG and the SDC funded Aparajita. The aim of these discussions was to identify areas of synergy and to help to build the conceptual model underpinning a women’s empowerment approach.

Table A2.1. Summary of types and number of stakeholders interviewed during the the MTR

Stakeholder group	Methods	Number of people met
Rupantar		
Rupantar HQ staff	Group discussion, individual interviews	17

Rupantar - project field staff (trainers, area managers, union organisers)	Group discussion, visioning exercise	41
Rupantar executive committee and general body	Group discussion	8
Nari Bikas Kendra		
NBK leaders (and holders of formal positions)	Group discussion	30
NBK general members	Group discussion	11
NBK ward committees (leaders and committee members)	Group discussion	23
Upazilla coordinating committee	Group discussion	23
Division-level coordinating committee	Group discussion	10
Extreme poor households (non-members)	Group discussion, individual interviews	7
Extreme poor NBK members	Group discussion	15
Adolescent group	Group discussion	12
Local elected bodies and service providers		
Union Parishad reserved seat members (former NBK)	Group discussion	21
Local elected bodies (union and upazilla)	Group discussions	15
Political leaders	Group discussion	3
Citizen leaders	Group discussion	13
Local service providers (GO)	Group discussion	15
Meetings in Dhaka: other projects and consultant support to Rupantar		
SDLG	Meeting	2
Aparajita	Group discussion	14
Verulam Associates Ltd	Group discussion	4
Total		284

A2.2 People met

Sub : Meeting with Rupantar Senior Staff

Place : Rupantar Meeting Room, Khulna

Date : 25 April 2013

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Department/Project
1.	Nasrin Sultana Lima	Officer	Admin
2.	Abu Nahin Md. Raquib	Director	Finance and Administration
3.	Swapan Guha	Executive Director	Rupantar
4.	Nargis Dilruba	Project Assistant	Grassroots Woman Leadership
5.	Shahadat Hossain Bacchu	M&E Officer	Grassroots Woman Leadership
6.	Rafiqul Islam Khokon	Executive Director	Rupantar
7.	Subol Ghosh	M&E Officer	Grassroots Woman Leadership
8.	Mizanur Rahman Panna	Director	Rupantar Theatre
9.	Ashim Ananda Das	Special Affairs Officer	Governance Program
10.	Faruque Ahmed	Program Coordinator	Disaster and Management
11.	Monju Ara Parvin	Manager	HR
12.	Akhtarunnessa Nisha	Manager	Rupantar Theatre

13.	Morshada Khatun Dilara	In charge	Rupantar Human Resource Development Unit
14.	Mita Mojundar	Field Support Officer	Rupantar
15.	Prabir Biswas	IEC Development Officer	NSA
16.	Rizia Pervin	Focal Person	We Can Campaign
17.	Kh. Zeelani Hossain	PO	Urban Governance Program

Sub : Dialogue meeting with LEBs, Citizen Leaders and NBK Leaders**Place : Chandpai UP Office, Mongla, Bagerhat****Date : 26 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Department/Organization
1.	Md. Tariqul Islam	Chairman	Chandpai Union Parishad
2.	Sk. Shakir Hossain	Citizen Leader	West Chandpai
3.	Nazmul Shakh	Citizen Leader	East Chandpai
4.	Md. Samsul Hque Rokon	Member	Chandpai UP
5.	Md. Aiub Ali	Member	Chandpai UP
6.	Md. Jahangir Mollick	Member	Chandpai UP
7.	Angress Sardar	Member, Reserve	Chandpai UP
8.	Goutam Biswas	Citizen Leader	Wast Gainmari
9.	Nemai Chandra Biwas	Citizen Leader	Bramman Math
10.	Owazed Shekh	Citizen Leader	East Chandpai
11.	Md. Nasir Uddin	Citizen Leader	West Chandpai
12.	Sobita Biswas	Chairperson, NBK	Kainmari
13.	Ruto Sardar	Member, NBK	Narikel Tala
14.	Geta Sarkar	Member, NBK	Malgazi
15.	Chobi Halder	Treasurer, NBK	Kainmari
16.	Momota Adutto	Organizing Secretary, NBK	Malgazi
17.	Sujata Pal	Chairperson, NBK	Burirdanga

Sub : Meeting with Chandpai 6 No. Ward Committee**Place : Chandpai UP Office, Mongla, Bagerhat****Date : 26 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Department/Organization
1.	Sobita Biswas	Chairperson,	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
2.	Urimilla Kundu	Vice-chairperson	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
3.	Copola Roy	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
4.	Aina Roy	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
5.	Monika Biswas	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
6.	Geta Roy	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
7.	Dipali Biswas	Vice-chairperson	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
8.	Uma Biswas	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
9.	Jorna Halder	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
10.	Momota Halder	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward
11.	Rashida Begum	Member	Kainmari 6 No. Ward

Sub : Meeting with field level staffs**Place : Rupantar Training Centre, Mongla, Bagerhat****Date : 26 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Atabur Rahman Tipu	Trainer	Rampal
2.	Kakoli Haldar	Union Organizer	Ujalkur, Rampal
3.	Sova Rani Audikhari	Union Organizer	Burirdanga, Rampal
4.	Md. Kabir Akbor (Pintu)	Union Organizer	Gouramva, Rampal
5.	Shakira Khatun	Union Organizer	Baintala, Rampal
6.	Moyna Khatun	Union Organizer	Mollickerber, Rampal
7.	Dulali Mondol	Union Organizer	Parikhali, Rampal
8.	Afroza Akther	Union Organizer	Mithakhali, Mongla
9.	Mukul Mondol	Union Organizer	Bashtali, Rampal
10.	Kartayoni Haldar	Union Organizer	Rampal
11.	Rita Roy	Union Organizer	Vospatia, Rampal
12.	Abu Saleh Shahin	Union Organizer	Khulna
13.	Sujit Mondol	Trainer	Rajnagar, Rampal
14.	Partho Protim Tagure	Union Organizer	Hurka, Rampal
15.	G. M. Mostak Hossain	Union Organizer	Bhandarcote, Batiaghata
16.	Chinmoy Roy	Union Organizer	Gangarampur, Batiaghata
17.	Dipok Roy	Area Manager	Dacope
18.	Krishnandu Mollick	Union Organizer	Surkhali, Batiaghata
19.	Polash Roy	Union Organizer	Loudobe, Dacope
20.	Santonu Mondol	Union Organizer	Batiaghata
21.	Shamima Parvin	Union Organizer	Amirpur, Batiaghata
22.	Sonchita Mondol	Union Organizer	Sutarkhali, Dacope
23.	Aporna Roy	Union Organizer	Bajua, Dacope
24.	Bipasha Gain	Union Organizer	Kailashgonj, Dacope
25.	Azizul Hoque	Union Organizer	Kamarkhola, Dacope
26.	Gourango Sarkar	Union Organizer	Dacope
27.	Kakoli Rani Kundu	Union Organizer	Baliadanga, Batiaghata
28.	Dinobondhu Shil	Union Organizer	Tildanga, Dacope
29.	Kalyani Roy	Trainer	Batiaghata & Dacope
30.	Bimollendu Biswas	Union Organizer	Pankali, Dacope
31.	Dipti Roy	Area Manager	Batiaghata
32.	Jonaki Moholdar	Union Organizer	Jalma, Batiaghata
33.	Diponkar Mondol	Union Organizer	Sonaitala, Mongla
34.	Dipti Roy	Union Organizer	Chila, Mongla
35.	Debobroto Biswas	Union Organizer	Chindpai, Mongla
36.	Jahangir Kobir Methu	Union Organizer	Surdarbon, Mongla
37.	Anup Roy	Area Manager	Mongla & Rampal
38.	Sunitee Roy	Trainer	Mongla
39.	Shafia	Project Manager	Khulna
40.	Shahadat Hossain Bacchu	M&E Officer	Khulna
41.	Sk. Zarzis Ullha	Operation Coordination	Khulna

Sub : Meeting with NBK Committee and General People in Hurka Union**Place : Hurka NBK Office, Hurka, Rampal, Bagerhat****Date : 27 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Basonti Mondol	Asst. organizing secretary	Hurka
2.	Indrani Roy	Member	Kathamari
3.	Sorola Shil	Member	Nolbunia
4.	Sorola Mondol	Chairpersons	Hurka
5.	Banani Ghorami	Member	Hurka
6.	Joyoshree Sarkar	Treasurer	Hurka
7.	Sukumar Ejaradar	Chairpersons	Hurka
8.	Jorna Mondol	Secretary	Hurka
9.	Gayatri	Adviser	Hurka
10.	Kobita Mondol	General Member	Hurka
11.	Bokul Mondol	General Member	Hurka
12.	Eva Biswas	General Member	Hurka
13.	Bithika Biswas	General Member	Hurka
14.	Soroma Pare	General Member	Hurka
15.	Urma Sarkar	General Member	Hurka
16.	Juthika Sarkar	General Member	Hurka

Sub : Meeting with 4 No. Ward Committee of Rampal Union**Place : Rampal Union Parishad, Rampal, Bagerhat****Date : 27 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Shuli	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
2.	Tahamina Begum	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
3.	Joytun Begum	Chairperson	Jonjonia, Rampal
4.	Sahina	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
5.	Jahanara Begum	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
6.	Rajeya Begum	Secretary	Jonjonia, Rampal
7.	Humayara Begum	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
8.	Rina Parvin	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
9.	Asma	Organizing Secretary	Jonjonia, Rampal
10.	Sumi Begum	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal
11.	Shahida	Vice-chairperson	Jonjonia, Rampal
12.	Salima Akther Urmi	Member	Jonjonia, Rampal

Sub : Meeting with UZC Committee of Rampal Upazilla**Place : Rampal Union Parishad, Rampal, Bagerhat****Date : 27 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Ms Hosnara Mili	Vice-Chairperson	Parikhali
2.	Angel Mridha	Chairperson	Uzalkur
3.	Layla Yesmin	General Secretary	Uzalkur
4.	Asma	Member	Uzalkur
5.	Rozina	Member	Baintala
6.	Jorna Mondol	Vice-Chairperson	Hurka
7.	Durga Rani Biswas	Member	Baintala
8.	Asma	Member	Rampal
9.	Sushoma Biswas	Member	Rampal
10.	Anjana Mozumdar	Member	Parikhali
11.	Rotna Mozumdar	Member	Bashtali
12.	Madhuri Mondol	Member	Rajnagor
13.	Shahanaz Parvin	Member	Gouramva
14.	Monu Sarkar	Member	Parikhali
15.	Khairunessa	Member	Rajnagor
16.	Sagorica Halder	Member	Rajnagor
17.	Biva Das	Member	Vojpatia
18.	Krishana Shuli	Member	Mllickerber
19.	Juma Mukarzee	Member	Vojpatia
20.	Shahana Begum	Member	Gouramva
21.	Taslina Akther Bristi	Secretary	Gouramva
22.	Sukumari Ejaradar	Member	Hurka
23.	Rehena Begum	Member	Rampal

Sub : Meeting with Rupantar EB & GB Member**Place : Rupantar Meeting Room, Khulna****Date : 27 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Occupation
1.	Shamima Sultana Shelu	Member, Rupantar Executive Body	Development Worker
2.	Protiva Biswas	Member, Rupantar General Body	UP Member
3.	Md. Abu Zafor	Member, Rupantar General Body	Ex-UP Chairman
4.	Nasima Akther	Member, Rupantar General Body	Social Worker
5.	Selina Akther Priya	Member, Rupantar General Body	Lawyer
6.	Ashim Kumar Paul	Member, Rupantar General Body	Development Worker
7.	A. K. Hiru	Member, Rupantar General Body	Journalist
8.	Rafiqul Islam Khokon	Treasure, Rupantar Executive Body	Development Worker

Sub : Meeting with adolescent group**Place : Batiaghata Area Office, Batiaghata, Khulna****Date : 28 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Kuhali Boiragi	Vice-chairperson	Khulshabunia

2.	Dalia Mondol	Chairperson	Maitbhanga
3.	Reshma Khatun	Secretary	Hetalbunia
4.	Nethor Biswas	Secretary	Boshurabad
5.	Shuli Mondol	Chairperson	Hetalbunia
6.	Pappu Mohaldar	Secretary	Bolabunia
7.	Sudipta Sarkar	Vice-chairperson	Maitbhanga
8.	Abir Roy	Vice-chairperson	Fultala
9.	Irani Roy	Chairperson	Hatbati
10.	Mollicka Mondol	Vice-chairperson	Hatbati
11.	Rupa Roy	Vice-chairperson	Hoglabunia
12.	Suma Mondol	Vice-chairperson	Mailmara

Sub : Meeting with Union Parishad Member (Reserve)**Place : Batiaghata BRDB Hall Room, Batiaghata, Khulna****Date : 28 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Morzina Begum	UP Member	6 No. Baliadanga UP
2.	Shilpi Nahar	UP Member	6 No. Baliadanga UP
3.	Ms. Sahela Akther	UP Member	6 No. Baliadanga UP
4.	Krishna Biswas	UP Member	7 No. Tildanga UP
5.	Lotika Golder	UP Member	1 No. Pankhali UP
6.	Anita Roy	UP Member	6 No. Kamarkhola UP
7.	Tondra Roy	UP Member	8 No. Bajua UP
8.	Konika Golder	UP Member	7 No. Tildanga UP
9.	Blue Mondol	UP Member	8 No. Bajua UP
10.	Shuli Mistri	UP Member	2 No. Batiaghata UP
11.	Ms. Pewara Begum	UP Member	1 No. Jalma UP
12.	Gayarti Biswas	UP Member	Hurka UP, Rampal
13.	Lavli Khatun	UP Member	4 No. Rampal UP
14.	Lutfurnahar	UP Member	1 No. Rampal UP
15.	Mahamuda Begum	UP Member	7 No. Amirpur UP
16.	Aroti Boiragi	UP Member	9 No. Batiaghata UP
17.	Rezia Sultana	UP Member	4 No. Surkhali UP
18.	Blue Biswas	UP Member	Sundorbon UP
19.	Nina Mitro	UP Member	Jalma UP
20.	Shamoli Roy	UP Member	Gongarampur UP
21.	Sulata Bala	UP Member	2 No. Batiaghata UP

Sub : Meeting with Citizen Committee Member and LEBs**Place : Batiaghata BRDB Hall Room, Batiaghata, Khulna****Date : 28 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Md. Khairul Islam Khan	Chairman	Amirpur Union Parishad
2.	Nogendra Nath Biswas	Citizen Leader	1 No. Jalma
3.	Dr. Md. Golom Hossain	Citizen Leader	3 No. Gangarampur
4.	Prohllad Joyadder	Chairpersons, Citizen	2 No. Batiaghata

		committee	
5.	Md. Shahin Alam	Citizen Leader	Baliadanga
6.	Nirangon Shikder	UP Member	3 No. Gangarampur UP
7.	Robindra Nath Mondol	Citizen Leader	2 No. Batiaghata
8.	Humayan Kabir	Citizen Leader	Vandarcote
9.	Sudhangshu Moholdar	Citizen Leader	Batiaghata
10.	Md. Saifur Rahman	UP Member	Baliadanga UP
11.	Swapan Gain	UP Member	Jalma UP
12.	Bijoy Krishna Mollick	UP Member	Amirpur UP
13.	Chinmoy Kumar Mondol	UP Member	Batiaghata UP
14.	Md. Moferzzel Shekh	UP Member	Vandarcote UP

Sub : Meeting with extreme poor people**Place : Batiaghata BRDB Hall Room, Batiaghata, Khulna****Date : 28 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Got type of support	Address
1.	Anita Chaprashhi	Widow Allowance	Vandarcote
2.	Beauty Mondol	VGD Allowance	Vandarcote
3.	Bokul	Widow Allowance	Batiaghata
4.	Rikta Roy	VGD Allowance	Batiaghata
5.	Romash	Disable Allowance	Gongarampur
6.	Surendra Nath Boiragi	Old Age Allowance	Batiaghata
7.	Solaman Kha	Old Age Allowance	Batiaghata

Sub : Meeting with Govt. Official, Political Party Leader and Journalist**Place : Rupantar Area Office, Batiaghata, Khulna****Date : 28 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Got type of support	Address
1.	Sk. Abdul Hamid	President	Press Club
2.	Md. Golam Moktadir	Upazilla Corporative Officer	Batiaghata
3.	Md. Nazmul Haque	UWAO	Batiaghata
4.	Bibek Biswas	Political Leader	Batiaghata
5.	Kamrul Islam	Political Leader (BNP)	Batiaghata
6.	Kherod Boiragi	Political Leader (CPB)	Batiaghata
7.	Protap Ghosh	President	Press Club, Batiaghata
8.	Monayem Khan	Youth Development Officer	Batiaghata
9.	N. M. Rofiquel Islam	Social Welfare Officer	Batiaghata
10.	Anu Krishna Sarkar	Livestock Officer	Batiaghata
11.	Indrajit Shikdar	Vice-President	Press Club, Batiaghata

Sub : Meeting with Women Central Committee and Secondary Stakeholder**Place : Rupantar Meeting Room, Khulna****Date : 29 April 2013**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Occupation/Organization
1.	Monowara Begum	Member, Central Committee	Teacher
2.	Protiva Biswas	Member, Central Committee	Women Leader
3.	Ashalata Dhali	Vice-chairperson, Central Committee	Women Leader
4.	F. M. Aktherurzaman	Coordinator	PLEED
5.	Adv. Popy Bannerjy	Executive Member, Central Committee	Lawyer
6.	Adv. Aloka Nanda Das	Chairperson	Lawyer
7.	Ashok Saha	Coordinator	BLAST
8.	Adv. Mominul Islam	Coordinator	Bangladesh Manobodhikar Bastobayan Sangshtha (Human Rights Organization)
9.	Adv. Taslima	Member, Central Committee	Lawyer
10.	Adv. Shamima Sultana	Organizing Secretary, Central Committee	Lawyer

Subject: Sharing Meeting with General Member of 1 no. ward

Venue: House of Champa Biswas

Date: 29 April, 2013

Sl.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Dipali Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
2.	Rita Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
3.	Parboti Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
4.	Anaroti	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
5.	Shikha Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
6.	Niva Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
7.	Bina Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
8.	Anaroti Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
9.	Renuka roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
10.	Rekha	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
11.	Rubi Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
12.	Joanty Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
13.	Saibba halder	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
14.	Kamola	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward
15.	Likhu Roy	General Member	Pankhali 1 no. Ward

Subject: Meeting with NBK Leader

Venue: Dacope Area Office

Date: 29.04.13

Sl.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Rina Roy	Chairperson	Kamarkhola
2.	Nomita Halder	Accountant	Sutarkhali

3.	Doli Aktar	Chairperson	Pankhali
4.	Kamola Gayin	Vice Chairperson	Banishanta
5.	Sorojini Mondol	Accountant	Banishanta
6.	Kalpona Biswas	Secretary	Banishanta
7.	Ranjita Gayin	Chairperson	Dacope
8.	Shanti Rani Sarker	Chairperson	Sutarkhali
9.	Usah Rani Sana	General Secretary	Tildanga
10.	Latika Roy	Secretary	Pankhali
11.	Nazma Begum	Welfare Secretary	Kamarkhola
12.	Minoti Gayin	Chairperson	Tildanga
13.	Rina Mistri	Secretary	koilashganj
14.	Anuva Sarker	Chairperson	koilashganj
15.	Momotaz Begum	Chairperson	Lawdove
16.	Ruth Sarker	Secretary	Lawdove
17.	Dankumari	Chairperson	Bajua
18.	Kollani Roy	Accountant	Pankhali
19.	Dipali Mondal	Structural Secretary	Bajua
20.	Sandha Gayin	Secretary	Dacope
21.	Sarmila Sarker	Structural Secretary	koilashganj

Subject: Meeting with LEBs and Government Service Provider

Venue: Dacope Area Office

Date: 29.04.13

Sl.	Name	Designation	Address
1.	Abdul Haque Hawlader	VDBO	PDBF Dacope
2.	Gourpada Bachar	Vice Chairman	Dacope
3.	Abdur Rahman	W.T.F	Dacope
4.	SK. Mahbur Rahman	UYDO	Dacope
5.	Khan Motaher Hossain	VSSO	Dacope
6.	Md. Salim Khan	PIO	Dacope
7.	Md. Alauddin	S.A.A.O	Dacope
8.	Sudev Roy	Chairman	Banishanta
9.	Molla Saiful Islam	DOF	Dacope
10.	Sanjoy Moral	Chairman	Dacope V.P

Meetings in Dhaka

Sub : Meeting with OD team , Verulam Associates Ltd

Place : Dhanmondi

Date : 23 April 2013 at 6:00pm

Name	Designation	Organisation
Najmul Huda	Institutional Development Specialist / Coordinator	Verulam Associates
Maheen Sultan	Gender, Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist	Verulam Associates
Amita Dey	SDC Consultant	

Sub : Meeting with OD team, Verulam Associate Ltd**Place : SDC Meeting room****Date : 02 May 2013 at 8:00 am**

Name	Designation	Organisation
Najmul Huda	Institutional Development Specialist / Coordinator	Verulam Associates
Maheen Sultan	Gender, Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist	Verulam Associates
M. A. Rashid	Training Specialist / Senior Consultant	Verulam Associates
Fouzia Haque, FCA	Financial Management Specialist	Verulam Associates
Sabina Yasmein Lubna	Sr. Programme Officer	SDC
Amita Dey	SDC Consultant	
Mary Hobley	SDC Consultant	

Sub : Meeting with Aparajita Project partners**Place : SDC Meeting Room****Date : 24 April 2013 at 11:00am**

Name	Designation	Organisation
Subhash Chandra Saha	Monitoring and Research Expert	PRIP Trust
Habibur Rahman	Program Coordinator	PRIP Trust
Md. Morshed Alam	Monitoring and Reporting Manager	Khan Foundation
Md. Rezaur Rahman	Program Coordinator	Khan Foundation
Omar Khaium	Training Coordinator	Khan Foundation
Belayet Hossain	Senior Program Officer	Democracywatch
Saiful Islam	Coordinator, M&E	Democracywatch
Selina Sultana	KCE-F	Steps Towards Development
Bhaskar Chakraborty	SPO	Steps Towards Development
Pronoy Ghos	M&E Specialist	Steps Towards Development
Chandan Kumar Laheri	Coordinator	Steps Towards Development
Shefali Begum	Deputy Director, LG & Training	PRIP Trust
Faisal M Rahman	Project Coordinator	Democracywatch
Mahabul Alam	National Program Facilitator	-----
Sabina Yasmein Lubna	Sr. Programme Officer	SDC
Amita Dey	SDC Consultant	
Mary Hobley	SDC Consultant	

Sub : Meeting with SDLG Team**Place : SDLG office****Date : 23 April 2013 at 2:00pm**

Name	Designation	Organisation
Jerome Sayre	Chief of Party	USAID SDLG Project
Dr. Zarina Rahman Khan	Deputy Chief of Party	USAID SDLG Project
Amita Dey	SDC Consultant	
Mary Hobley	SDC Consultant	

Annex 3 Itinerary

Date	Activity
Sunday 21 April	Depart UK for Bangladesh
Monday 22 April	Arrive Dhaka in evening
Tuesday 23 April	Briefing with SDC staff; meeting with USAID funded SDLG, meeting with OD consultant team - Verulam Associates Ltd
Wednesday 24 April	Meeting with Aparajita partners; departure for Khulna; evening meeting with Executive Director of Rupantar
Thursday 25 April	Presentation from Rupantar on project; discussion of OD progress with senior management; detailed discussion with project staff on progress since MTR 2009
Friday 26 April	Meetings in Mongla, Chandpai Union NBK ward committee, LEB, citizen leaders and NBK leader meeting, meeting with all field staff
Saturday 27 April	Meetings in Rampal – NBK ward committee meeting, Upazilla NBK coordination committee, NBK union level committee meeting, meeting with Rupantar executive committee and general body
Sunday 28 April	Meetings in Batiaghata – adolescent group, meeting with NBK leaders elected to UP seats, meeting with extreme poor households (non-members of NBKs), meeting with government service delivery agencies, and journalists; meeting with LEBs and citizen committee members
Monday 29 April	Meetings in Dacope meeting with new extreme poor members, meeting with NBK leaders from 9 unions, meeting with government service delivery agencies, upazilla chairmen, vice-chairmen and UP chairmen. Meeting with divisional coordination committee members
Tuesday 30 April	Individual meetings with staff in Rupantar
Wednesday 1 May	Meeting with senior management to share preliminary findings. Departure for Dhaka
Thursday 2 May	Meeting with OD consultant team - Verulam Associates Ltd. Presentation and debriefing to SDC; depart for UK
Tuesday 7 May to Friday 17 May	Draft report writing
Friday 17 May	Submission of draft report to SDC

Annex 4 Progress from 2009 – review of MTR recommendations

This review was carried out by the MTR consultants together with the project staff.

	Recommendation 2009	Progress
R1	Broadening the membership base of NBKs and their reach	As Table? Indicates there has been a significant increase in the number of general members in the NBKs Rupantar has reviewed its members processes
R2	Building Rupantar-wide understanding of poverty and extreme poverty	<p>A conceptual and operational definition of extreme poverty was developed based on extensive discussion with field staff.</p> <p>In Rupantar’s annual staff conference in 2010, there was a special session to understand poverty and extreme poverty in the context of Bangladesh. All Rupantar staffs participated in the session and based on the discussion Rupantar prepared a conceptual definition of extreme poverty. It has been developed for all Rupantar’s activities including the Grassroots Women Leaders project.</p>
R3	Assessing the extent of extreme poverty in project working area and operational barriers to inclusion	<p>The project has tracking of the poverty characteristics of women committees and general membership. Studies on leadership and barriers to entry of extreme poor have not been done. Currently preparing profiles of 62 elected women leaders to understand how they managed to become leaders.</p> <p>Changes in service provision to extreme poor is tracked in the monitoring system.</p> <p>The annual self-evaluation for project staff and NBK leaders has developed an understanding of existing barriers and challenges and this is being used to change practice.</p>
R4	Improving the response of union Parishads	This has been fully incorporated into the design of Phase 4
R5	Mitigating political risk for women leaders and for Rupantar	<p>A political risk strategy was not developed, but issues of risks surrounding the politics of engagement are discussed in all meetings of the NBKs.</p> <p>Rupantar has also clearly stated that women are elected for the interests of women and not for any political party reason</p>
R6	Supporting the political empowerment process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a tailored support process for newly elected women UP 	This was incorporated into the design of Phase 4

	<p>members (general seats)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse and document the political processes (formal and informal) preceding the UP elections – to understand the effectiveness of political empowerment of women (to be used as the basis for lesson-learning and wider sharing) – particularly focus on the effects of the emergence of a new political class and behaviours (shrimp-cultivator areas) Consider potential mechanisms for support to women’s issues inside political parties including activating structures for women (committees etc) but consider carefully the reputational risks to Rupantar 	<p>This study was not done, although the work to look at the profiles of the 62 elected women will help to identify some key characteristics of leadership and could be used to help plan future campaigns</p> <p>This has not been done</p>
R7	Capturing and formalising staff knowledge	OD team is working with Rupantar staff on these issues
R8	Communication of knowledge	OD team is working with Rupantar staff on these issues
R9	Learning to analyse what works	The project has a learning-sharing system of meetings amongst project staff and NBK members. These are held on a monthly base with staff and bi-monthly with NBK members. Through this process the project captures and analyses the learning and uses it to report and share with other stakeholders
R10	Women in senior management position for project	The project is currently headed by a woman. The OD process is looking more generally at career structure and tiers of management.
R11	Tailored phase-out support programme to NBKs	This is a major piece of work that still needs to be completed.
R12	Internal review of mechanisms and numbers, functions and levels of committees	Rupantar’s other governance project personnel visited GWL project area and reviewed documents and reports and shared their observation, comments, recommendation in Rupantar’s monthly coordination meeting (the participant are senior management staffs, programme/project coordinators, Dept. Heads, Area Managers).
R13	Understanding power	Proposal to visit Sharique was not carried out due to a budget error meaning there was insufficient money to carry out this activity. This area of work still requires attention in the current phase.
R14	Building shared understanding of empowerment and governance processes with other SDC projects	Not yet developed sufficiently.
R15	Building shared understanding of empowerment and governance	There is some exchange between projects based on field visits, with examples of learning and

	processes with other projects inside Rupantar	changing practice in both the MJF funded project as well as in the Grass roots women leaders project. However, there is no thematic based exchange such as methods for monitoring trends and changes in governance, methods for identification of extreme poor etc
R16	Agreed action plan to respond to recommendations of MTR	Many of the content recommendations were incorporated into the design of this phase
R17	Harmonisation inside Rupantar around a strategic plan and combined products	This is currently under development through the OD support programme
R18	Conditions for SDC funding beyond 2010	These conditions were fulfilled
R19	SDC to provide funding to phasing-out phase and linked but separate programme of organisational review and development	SDC reviewed this recommendation and agreed to provide funding for a further phase of support to grassroots women's leadership ad OD of Rupantar
R20	Growing Rupantar's organisational capabilities	Phase 4 includes one outcome focused on the organisational development of Rupantar – the programme of support is currently underway to be completed by the end of 2013

Annex 5 Summary of Recommendations

For ease of reference the recommendations are all listed in this Annex. At the end Table A5.1 indicates priority and lead responsibility for each recommendation.

Outcome 1 NBKs independently work as agencies of rural women

Recommendation R1: improving internal governance of NBKs

Rupantar need to review with the NBKs their current internal mechanisms for decision-making and sharing of information. These reviews should be built into improving the operational procedures for good internal governance. This should include the following:

1. A review of decision-making processes in the committees and how these decisions are communicated to all members. This should include an assessment of how general members are also involved in decision-making processes.
2. A review of agenda-setting for committee meetings and how issues are identified for discussions
3. NBKs facilitated by Rupantar should put in place mechanisms to dissolve the artificial boundaries between the 'old 45' general members and the new members
4. Review and identify efficient means to share information with all members of the NBK – use of mobile phones (discuss with other SDC projects particularly SHARIQUE the different approaches that have been used for information sharing)

Recommendation R2: renewing leadership

Rupantar need to support NBKs to review the internal mechanisms to renew leadership and to ensure there are new leaders being developed at different levels of the organisation.

1. This should include analysis of the rate of turnover of leadership at all levels – ward, union and upazilla. It should include support from Rupantar to help the NBKs to develop rules concerning the length of time to be served on the committee and a limit to the number of terms.
2. Rupantar should support the NBKs to look at the barriers and opportunities for extreme poor women and other new members to access leadership positions as the basis for helping the NBKs to develop methods to increase the opportunities for new members to develop leadership skills

Recommendation R3: deepening understanding of the barriers for the extreme poor to engage in NBKs

In the 2009 MTR there was a recommendation to the project to deepen understanding of the barriers to extreme poor involvement in the NBKs. This piece of work is still required as there is still significant evidence that extreme poor are finding it difficult to access the NBKs.

1. The project should discuss with field staff and with the NBKs what issues they are facing in encouraging extreme poor women to join the NBKs. This should be supported by separate focus group discussions with extreme poor NBK members and non-NBK members to identify the barriers they perceive and ways in which they could be overcome. This should include assessment of any weaknesses in the current methods used to identify extreme poor by the NBKs.
2. As part of the planning and design for future work on women's empowerment - Rupantar should proactively engage with SDC-supported projects SHARIQUE and DASCOH to establish a discussion meeting with NBK members and participants in SHARIQUE and DASCOH who have

worked on approaches to identifying extreme poor. This should lead to a strengthening of approaches used by the NBKs and a good foundation for future work in this area.

Recommendation R4: building a shared understanding of the future direction of the NBKs and means to improve their independence

Rupantar need to support the NBKs to collectively develop a shared understanding of their future direction and to clarify their objectives. As part of this Rupantar should review the following issues, NBK organisational structures and develop a programme for operational support that can be incorporated in future development of the NBKs. This work should be completed before the end of phase 4:

1. Facilitate discussions with the NBKs over their future direction to build a common consensus on how they want to develop as a social movement and to build understanding of the risks of becoming a service delivery organisation with members as beneficiaries as opposed to equal citizens capable of demanding their rights
2. As part of the discussion process support NBKs to consider their constitutions and ways to amend them to reflect their mandates more closely. To feed into these discussions Rupantar should look at other women's organisations constitutions – including Naripokko, Nijera Kori etc.
3. Facilitate a small focused meeting on learning from other social movements to help to inform the discussions with the NBKs. This could include members of other movements such as Nijera Kori, Samata, Doorbar Network, Naripokkho, and Joyoti Societies (based in Jessore)
4. Support the NBKs to understand the tactics to deal with local power relations, the risks of partisan behaviours and use of NBKs for party political purposes
5. Support the NBKs to carry out an assessment of the levels of funds required to maintain an organisation supporting women's social and political empowerment to help the NBKs establish fund-raising strategies that will ensure they have sufficient money to support these types of objectives.
6. Support the NBKs to identify their own indicators of organisational success and build this into a participatory monitoring system that the NBKs can track and start to adjust their own practices rather than remaining reliant on the project staff to do this for them
7. The project needs to review its staffing support to the NBKs for the last months of the project and start to phase out direct support to those NBKs that are already demonstrating higher levels of competence and independence. These NBKs for example should conduct their own monthly meetings without requiring the presence of the union organiser.
8. Dissolve the central level coordination committee as it potentially undermines the independence of the NBKs. Support the NBKs to discuss and clarify the types of organisational structure for advocacy they might need at higher-levels. These structures should continue to be aligned to the local government tiers. Any advisory support the NBKs might require could be formalised in an advisory body but this should not be confused with a governance structure

Outcome 2 Local Government Institutions supportive to women's rights and entitlements

Recommendation R5: provision of structured support to newly elected women at union and upazilla parishad levels through partnership with other local government programmes

1. For the future development of this women's empowerment and political engagement model - Rupantar should consider partnering with other local governance programmes that are designed to provide capacity-building support to the union parishads and in particular to women members. Rupantar should proactively engage with other local governance programmes particularly those funded by SDC – SHARIQUE and APARAJITA to look for ways to

build synergy between the women's empowerment and political engagement model supported by Rupantar and the approaches developed by other projects to strengthen local government at union and upazilla level.

Recommendation R6: understanding the underlying power dynamics at the upazilla level

The fundamental challenge that must be addressed by the NBKs and Rupantar is how to ensure that the NBKs do not themselves become agents of political patronage but remain genuine movements of women's voice where women themselves are able to claim their rights rather than waiting to receive them from their patrons.

1. Rupantar needs to initiate a series of discussions with UP women members and the NBK leaders operating at ward, union and upazilla level to reflect on the ways in which they interact with their members and their constituents and to look for ways to reduce the risk of introducing patronage based political processes
2. Rupantar should initiate a series of discussions with the field staff and NBK members to understand the power dynamics at upazilla level and strategise how to develop the capacity and effectiveness of NBK actions both through the upazilla coordinating committee, as well as through wider campaigning.
3. In future programming, Rupantar should consider how it can build on the emerging watchdog role of NBKs and use its experience from the USAID funded PROGATI to support the social accountability skills of the NBKs
4. In future programming Rupantar should consider how it can partner with other organisations supporting the development of upazilla parishads to strengthen the role of women vice-chairs and to identify ways in which to mobilise the women's movement to promote gender equity concerns at the upazilla level.

Recommendation R7: learning to understand what works

Although the OD process is focusing on these issues of learning - the MTR strongly recommends that Rupantar invests in understanding the trends and the reasons underlying some of the changes noted in this MTR during the last few months of this phase of the project. This should include:

1. Trend-tracking changes – e.g. budget tracking to understand shifts in budgets, allocations to poor, women, marginal groups etc., compared to unions where the project does not operate
2. Analysis of key indicators such as the level of recruitment of new leaders to NBK leadership positions, including analysis of their well-being status (extreme poor, poor etc)
3. 'Satisfaction surveys' of demand-side to get a sense of breadth and depth of change in understanding and response (particularly important to survey extreme poor members and non-members)

Outcome 3 Organisational Development of Rupantar

Recommendation R8: organisational development issues

Verulam Associates are supporting a strong process of organisational development in Rupantar. At this stage it is difficult to assess the content outcome of this process as the key element the strategic plan is still to be developed. However, the MTR team have full confidence in the work of the consultants.

There are three main areas of concern that the team would like to highlight:

1. It is imperative that Rupantar senior management proactively engage with existing and new funders to discuss the progress they are making in the organisational changes as well as the thematic content for a new programmatic approach. This engagement must be in place in May

2013, as the time is very short to ensure there is funding in place for future work, particularly on developing the work on women's empowerment. There is a high risk of a major budget short-fall across the whole organisation.

2. The second area concerns the future costs of managing the transition from the old Rupantar to a new programmatic based organisation. The MTR recommends that Rupantar with support from Verulam produces a costed plan for this transition period as soon as it is possible (i.e. after agreement on the strategic plan) to ensure that this can be factored into discussions with future donors in the next few months.
3. The third area concerns Rupantar's ability to attract the right types of staff with the levels of analytical and strategic experience necessary to move Rupantar from a projectised organisation to a programmatic organisation. This will include particular efforts to build up the monitoring and research functions of the organisation. The MTR is confident that this will be addressed in the OD process, but considers it a very high risk if it is not addressed properly for the future effective functioning of Rupantar

Action plan for completion of Phase 4

Recommendation R9: Action plan for these 4 areas of immediate activity

Rupantar needs to put in place an action plan to address these four areas of detailed short-term recommendations

1. review of internal governance processes of NBKs
2. develop the conceptual basis for the women empowerment and political engagement model
3. address the monitoring issues
4. address the risks outlined with a response indicating how they are to be addressed

Recommendation R10: Agreed action plan to respond to recommendations of MTR

Rupantar needs to put in place an action plan, agreed with SDC, to address recommendations 1-8 and 11. The action plan should detail activities to be carried out to fulfil the recommendations with a time-line and responsibility for ensuring the work is done. Annex 5 lists the recommendations, the priority and responsibility.

Developing the model for women's empowerment and political engagement

Recommendation R11: Developing the model for women's empowerment and political engagement as the basis for Rupantar's future programmatic work

The team recommends that Rupantar consider the phased expansion of the women's empowerment model as the basis for future Rupantar programming this should be based on the following actions:

1. Incorporation into the development of the women's empowerment model the recommended 4 areas of detailed activity outlined in section 3.1 including internal governance and the political space for engagement of NBKs at the upazilla level
2. Clear development of mechanisms for building the political ladder at the bottom end so extreme poor women can access leadership opportunities as well as more careful consideration to how women are to be supported at the higher ends of the ladder.
3. Discuss and share approaches to women's empowerment with APARAJITA and build areas of potential common work
4. Consideration of how this model could be used to build more climate resilient agency of poor and extreme poor women

Table A5.1 Recommendations, priority and lead responsibility

No.	Recommendation Description	Priority for 4 th phase	Lead Responsibility
Outcome 1 Governance, agency and voice recommendations			
R1	Improving internal governance of NBKs	High	Project management
R2	Renewing leadership	High	Project management
R3	Deepening understanding of the barriers for the extreme poor to engage in NBKs	High	Rupantar senior management with project management
R4	Building a shared understanding of the future direction of the NBKs and means to improve their independence	High	Rupantar senior management with project management, to ensure the lessons learned from this work feeds into programmatic development
Outcome 2 LGI supportive to rights and entitlements of women			
R5	Provision of structured support to newly elected women at UP and UzP through partnerships with other local government programmes	Medium	Rupantar senior management with project management to explore options for partnership as part of design process for development of model of women's empowerment
R6	Understanding the underlying power dynamics at the upazilla level	Medium	Project management – this is an important part of strengthening the women's empowerment model and should be part of the design process for expansion of the approach
R7	Learning to understand and analyse what works	High	Project management to lead on this with support from the monitoring officers. This should provide important evidence for use in funding proposals
Outcome 3 Organisational Development			
R8	Issues to be focused on during OD process	High	Rupantar senior management and OD consultants
Action plan for completion of phase 4			
R9	Action plan for these 4 areas of immediate activity	High	Rupantar senior management with project management
R10	Agreed action plan to respond to MTR recommendations	High	Rupantar senior management with project management, SDC to approve
Building the conceptual base for further development of the women's empowerment and political engagement model			
R11	Developing the model as basis for Rupantar's future programmatic work	High (part of design for funding proposals)	Rupantar senior management with project management

Annex 6 Changing objectives over the last 15 years

This shows how understanding has developed in Rupantar of the key elements of a women's empowerment model. The last phase has focused on the quality aspects of the women's organisations and particularly on identifying the key groups to be supported by the women's organisations – the poor and the extreme poor. The clearer focus on poverty started in phase 3 and has been further developed in phase 4.

Project phase and commentary by MTR	Pilot (1998-2000)	Phase 1 (2000-2004)	Phase 2 (2004-2007)	Phase 3 (2007-2010) as proposed by Rupantar	Phase 3 (2007-2010) As amended by SDC	Phase 4 (2011-2014)
Goal <i>Shift away from attaining women leadership to the quality of this leadership to the link between leadership and delivering change, finally to explicitly mentioning change to the poor (added by SDC) and in phase 4 change to the poorest with a strong focus on voice and agency</i>	Building leadership among grassroots women	Improvement of women leadership and capabilities in conducting grassroots women organisation programme	Development of active women leadership at the union and upazilla level in four upazilla of Sundarban region by 2007	To promote/facilitate active participation of women in local decision making process that contributes to improved living conditions for the women and the communities	To promote/facilitate active participation of women in local decision making process that contributes to improved living conditions for the women and the communities, especially the poor	To improve the access to livelihood assets and services for rural women, particularly the poorest , through strengthening their voice and agency
Objectives (outcomes in phase 4)						
<i>Focus on what is to be done and why and by whom – inserted response from service providers to demand from women</i>					To train, advise and accompany women leaders, organisations and committees to address women	

					rights, issues and to raise gender awareness of UP and public service providers	
<i>Clear focus on supply-side response, separating the response from the demand</i>						Local government institutions (LGIs) are supportive to women's relevant development topics; they support the rights and entitlements of women with respectively conducive and inclusive policies (supply-side)
<i>Focus on women's leadership and organisation</i>	Building an organisational infrastructure for grassroots women	To improve women leaders social and organisational skill	Active women leadership at social and organisational level in 20 unions in 3 years			NBKs independently work as agencies of rural women, particularly the poor, to demand and secure adequate (women relevant) services provided by local governments as well as to influence local decision-making processes in favour of women's oriented local development endeavours (demand-side)
<i>Focus on women's organisation and participation (phase 4 clearer expression of the qualities of the organisation as well as a focus on poor women)</i>	Increasing women's participation in local government	To strengthen the WCC activities at community level in assisting grassroots women	Strengthening of women organisational activities (WC/WCC/UCC) in 20 unions of 4 upazilla			
	Ensuring gender equity					
<i>Building enabling</i>	Building civic					

<i>environment for women's voice</i>	awareness					
<i>Focus on field staff – since removed</i>		To improve field workers motivational skill				
<i>Focus on management and organisational issues inside Rupantar</i>		To improve management and monitoring capacity for the facilitating organisation	Enhanced management and monitoring capacity of the facilitating organisation		To strengthen capacities of Rupantar for more effective measuring, documentation and dissemination of results and for strategic networking and advocacy	Rupantar's organisational set up is based on a clearly defined strategic plan; its management is efficient and results oriented

Annex 7 Progress towards achievement of outcomes and goal

This assessment is based on a review of project monitoring data, operational reports, the project's own review before the MTR and discussions held with key stakeholder groups during the MTR mission.

Narrative Summary	Indicators	Progress	Project and MTR commentary on progress to January 2013
Overall Objective (Goal)			
To improve the access to livelihood assets and services for rural women, particularly the poorest, through strengthening their voice and agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree of access to quality services, especially by the poorest women (e.g. health service, water and sanitation, education, income opportunities, economic assets) ▪ Degree of increased recognition, inclusion and participation of poorest women in communities and UPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved access of poorest women to a range of livelihood services - additional x% identified and received services as a result of NBK interventions ▪ The data from the project indicate a decline in numbers of extreme poor women from 2009 both as general members and in ward committees. There is no clear explanation for this data 	The project is on track to contribute to the achievement of its goal. Unfortunately it is not clear whether the project baseline can be used as an impact evaluation tool so tracking the degree of impact as a result of project interventions may not be possible. At this stage it is possible to say with confidence that the project is having a direct impact on over 5,000 extreme poor women and has increased the access to assets of at least 80,000 poor women and men through better targeting of training and services to those who are the poorest.
Outcomes			
1. NBKs independently work as agencies of rural women, particularly the poor, to demand and secure adequate (women's relevant) services provided by local governments, as well as to influence local decision	1. # of NBKs independently function as institutions (followed criteria)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. all 32 NBKs have developed annual plans and budgets, all have organizational funds (and increased them over the last year) and demonstrated improved book-keeping; NBKs are receiving direct government grants from Women's affairs Department; all are submitting monthly reports. In 14 unions there were changes in leaders that were considered to be inactive. 2. Monitoring data indicate that a large proportion of 	Achievements NBKs now recognized as social organisations for establishing grassroots women's rights and securing adequate services for the poor and poorest. NBK leaders have established their leadership in the local-level political arena

<p>making processes in favour of women's oriented local development endeavours (demand side)</p>	<p>2. # of cases/services /demands (rights issues) of the poor including poorest addressed</p> <p>3. # of cases handled in decision making at local level (union) resulting support to poor rights and livelihood</p> <p>4. # of NBK members participated and secured in local level elections</p>	<p>non-NBK members come to the NBKs to help resolve a range of problems (a total of 25,203). The range of support includes prevention of early marriage, eve-teasing, help with funerals, legal aid support, access to land for the landless, information and help to get certificates (such as citizen, death certificates, birth registration and trade licences) 4,687 women and 4,509 men have been helped in these different ways through the NBK's direct support or through raising the issues with the concerned authority. The NBKs have been particularly successful in helping over</p> <p>3. NBKs are not just handling issues of social safety nets (5,391 extreme poor women received safety nets as a result of NBK interventions this is in addition to those on the union parishad lists) but are also linking health service provision to poor households, monitoring data indicate that over 165,000 vulnerable women and extreme poor have benefitted from the intervention of NBK members for a range of services and activities.</p> <p>4. In the first year of the project there was significant success in the UP reserved seat election – 137 women contested in 2011, 96 women contested for the reserved seats and 62 won; 40 women contested for the general seats and 1 woman won.</p> <p>NBK leaders continue to be successful in competing for positions on a range of other committees taking key roles such as chair, treasurer and organizing secretary. 1064 NBK members participated in these</p>	<p>Challenges: There still remain questions over the sustainability of NBKs after project phase-out as they are all relatively newly established as formal organisations. This includes their capacities to independently manage their finances and to develop clarity over the direction of the organisations.</p> <p>Internal communications with members remain underdeveloped.</p> <p>There is limited distribution of responsibilities amongst NBK leaders, with some concern that leadership and power is being concentrated in a few individuals.</p> <p>There are inadequate mechanisms to ensure general members can access leadership positions in the executive committee.</p> <p>There is increasing concern over partisan pressure on the NBKs as they are becoming an obvious source of votes and a reliable means to mobilise large numbers of people for a particular issue</p> <p>It is time consuming and often costly</p>
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	<p>5. # of poor women directly served on livelihood capital assets (material, human, social, physical and financial) building options</p>	<p>informal elections with 104 gaining executive positions and 960 as general members). These positions all help to strengthen their skills and provide a higher profile for future political success in UP elections</p> <p>5. Project monitoring data tracks the delivery of livelihood services and assets although it is not possible yet to assess individual changes in well-being as a result of interventions by the NBKs there has not yet been a re-survey against the baseline. At an aggregate level however, it is possible to link the effects of NBK voice and agency to the delivery of services to 86,268 women and men. The project database indicates that of these 30,920 are poor women. The major proportion of these benefits are from changes to physical infrastructure such as tubewells and road improvements. Direct changes in financial capital is achieved through social safety net support. Social capital increases are obvious for most of the women leaders with their active participation in a range of formal and informal committees and groups. Overall 9,305 women and 2,320 men have benefited from a range of trainings including productive and non-productive activities.</p>	<p>to keep up regular communication and advocacy efforts with LEBS. These issues will need to be considered as part of the future planning for the development of NBKs</p> <p>The challenges to women's election to general seats in the UP remain with highly male-dominated electoral processes, and large barriers to women's access to these seats.</p> <p>Continued influence and pressure from political parties in the local elections could undermine the legitimacy of women NBK members fighting seats on women's rights if it is perceived they are working to a political party agenda</p> <p>NBKs have to fight against the existing political influence over government service providing lists as well as high levels of nepotism in targeting. NBKs are now more used to using the RTI Act to help them to challenge these practices</p>
<p>2. Local government institutions (LGIs) are supportive to women's</p>	<p>▪ # of LGIs in practice of inclusive demand driven polices for the welfare of women and poor</p>	<p>▪ During the MTR anecdotal evidence indicated that women are taking active roles in the standing committees. Unfortunately the monitoring</p>	<p>Achievements There is clear evidence of increased responsiveness by UPs, Upazilla</p>

<p>relevant development topics; they support the rights and entitlements of women with respectively conducive and inclusive policies (supply side)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of LGIs responded to the demands of the poor women and delivered services to charge status (right & need) ▪ # of workshop and dialogue sessions performed between LGIs & NBKs and other concerned stakeholders brought 	<p>database does not record whether the presence of NBK women is translating into active participation, which then transforms into influence over decisions. A scan of decisions of UP and standing committees indicates that issues of poor people are included in the agenda, but it is not possible to track whether this is the direct result of the NBK members advocacy or whether it is a general trend. What is clear from monitoring data is that women are moving into decision-making positions in a range of committees (formal and informal) and have plans to achieve greater control of these positions in future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budget allocations to poor and women have changed in all 32 unions. Total UP budget allocations (over the last two years of the project) to poor and women targeted activities have amounted to Tk798,116 for women projects and Tk1,097,629 projects targeted to poor people. As part of demanding improved transparency the NBKs have also helped to ensure that over 1000 people have not had to pay extra money for certificates from the UP that should be given free. Government provisions to help the extreme poor e.g. the 40 days of work provision have been carefully targeted to the extreme poor by use of the NBK lists – over the last two years 650 women have benefited and 526 men. 15,191 extreme poor women and men have benefited from UP services including sanitation, food security, IGAs, disaster relief, allocations from standing committee budgets, decisions from village courts and safe 	<p>Parishads, and government and NGO service providers – services and budgets indicate increased targeting to extreme poor and poor households based on the lists drawn up by NBKs.</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>An ongoing problem is the difficulty of service providers being able to respond to demand, as budgets are limited and targets often prescribed.</p> <p>The control of the political parties and the MP over LGIs continues to be a problem driving poor allocation decisions</p> <p>There are no formalized relationships with NBKs which means that NBKs have to be proactive in seeking out meetings and information from service providers and there are no feedback mechanisms from the service providers to NBKs.</p> <p>Despite the introduction of the ward shava – very few are operational making it difficult for ward-based participation and discussions.</p> <p>Although NBK members are now members in the standing committees,</p>
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	home new efforts	water	<p>many UPs do not hold regular meetings, making it difficult to ensure that decisions are taken in the right types of forums</p> <p>The lack of local resource mobilization means that the UPs have limited flexibility in their budgets to allocate resources to new types of activities particularly those that are of utility to women and to the poor and extreme poor</p>
<p>3. Rupantar's organizational set up is based on a clearly defined strategic plan; its management is efficient and results oriented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of governing body meetings arranged & decision taken ▪ Strategic Organizational Development plan adopted and achieved anticipated changes ▪ # of staffs motivated to contribute in positive developmental achievement, practice skills and positive in knowledge dissemination ▪ # of staffs competent to compare to baseline status of selective professional indicators (develop expertise to serve dimensional sector) ▪ # of new strategic themes planned & practiced that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both general body and executive committee meetings have been held taking a range of decisions most critically concerning key governance issues. ▪ Verulam Associates were appointed and started in October 2012 to support Rupantar's OD process ▪ A structured process of OD support with 8 major task areas identified, including review of policies, knowledge management, strategic planning, HRD and training. This has also included identifying potential donors, and sectors that are relevant to Rupantar. 	<p>Achievements</p> <p>The OD process is currently on-track with proposed activities, but it will not be possible to assess the effectiveness of the process until the strategic plan is developed and the consequent restructuring around a programmatic approach is achieved. At this stage it is clear that there is a lot of support for the process internally and a clear understanding at each level of the organization of the purpose of the OD process</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>The main challenge concerns the implementation of the OD process beyond the end of this phase as Rupantar continues to make the</p>

	brought additional improvements		transition from the existing structures to the new organization, based on a programmatic as opposed to projectised structures. This will require significant restructuring, and reskilling with new systems to support a programmatic approach. It is a major change that will require continued support. Rupantar will need to find financial sources to support this transition in the short-term.
Outputs			
1.1 Leaders of the women's agencies (NBKs) are trained; their capacities to participate in local governance process are developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of institutions (NBKs) received capacity building training and orientation ▪ # of local initiatives undertaken by NBKs ▪ # of women leaders trained on coaching and peer learning ▪ # of women leaders participated in UP election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the first year of the project focused on training NBK leaders and members on internal management of the NBKs. There has been little capacity building training during the second year of the project, although the involvement of NBK women members in project self evaluations has been an important initiative. ▪ NBKs continue to undertake local initiatives mainly focused on advocacy for access to government and NGO services and social safety nets . In the first year 10.239 poor men and women were directly supported through these actions. ▪ Peer learning training has continued with evidence from the field that NBK leaders are using this training to support others to learn how to conduct court yard meetings for example ▪ NBK members following their success in 2011 UP elections are now already planning their 	The NBKs still require a lot of training support to develop their internal governance capacities to ensure there are effective systems for leadership renewal, clear rules for terms of office and good systems for internal communication and feedback

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of poor women have advocated by the women leaders 	<p>candidacies for the next UP election with lists drawn up and agreed for whom is to stand. These agreements were reached during NBK meetings and formally recorded in resolutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NBK members, who are now in UP as reserve seat members, are planning to contest for general seats in the next UP election. NBKs continued to advocate specifically on behalf of poor women including safety net access as well as rights to khas land 	
1.2 NBK leaders influence pro-poor and women's rights; they focus on decision making process in formal and informal local organizations and LGIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of NBKs participated in formal and informal institutions in Union level decision-makings processes # of initiatives undertaken by NBKs to influence local institutions (GO and NGOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NBK leaders are participating in a range of formal and informal decision-making processes. 896 NBK leaders are getting experience in these different types of leadership positions and are learning how to influence decisions. NBK members access all 13 UP standing committees as well as 19 other government committees at the union level which deliver pro-poor services. In 2011-2012 54 NBK women were holding executive positions. NBK members have been actively engaged in ward shabas (where they have been initiated) and also at upazilla level with success in accessing safety nets, trainings and other livelihood support 	Progress on this output appears to be steady with women moving from presence to active participation to influence. The tactics of using these different formal and informal committees as a means for women to gain greater understanding and exposure so they can engage more effectively in the formal political process appears to be effective.
1.3 Mass people are aware of women issues and support women rights through NBKs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30% of the general people aware of women rights 40% of the local women aware of NBKs activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it is not clear from the monitoring data how this change is to be assessed. Currently there are no plans to assess general awareness of women's rights or specific awareness of NBK activities. There have been a range of activities to improve awareness including pot 	This output cannot be assessed as there is no clear monitoring data to indicate what the changes have been and no process in place to assess the change

		songs and orientation meetings with men and adolescent groups	
2.1 LGIs (UP and UZ) are motivated and capacitated to ensure more women and poor oriented service deliveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of LGIs aware of women rights and their roles regarding services to the women and poor ▪ # of eligible/poorest HH received safety nets services ▪ # of LGIs and # of members received life skill training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A series of workshops with the UP council focused on gender and development opened up understanding on gender-based rights. This has been operationalized through the pre-budget discussion process and resulted in some small allocations for women and poor people. ▪ Opening up understanding and building trust in the UP has led to the NBKs playing an important role in identification of real extreme poor households this has resulted in an additional 5391 of the most extreme poor women receiving safety net services – particularly VGD and VGF. In addition advocacy at the upazilla level with the social welfare officer has identified another 11 women who would not otherwise have got access to the safety nets. ▪ There was no focused training support for the LGIs during the second year of the project, although all stated during the MTR meetings that more training was required particularly of roles, responsibilities, laws and rules. 	This output will be mostly achieved by the end of the project. The main limitation is the limited training and capacity support the project has provided to LGIs – this is a fault of the design of the project and needs to be carefully considered when taking forward this approach to other projects and programmes.
2.2 LGIs are proactive and motivated to revise and adapt policies in accordance with women's and poor's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # LGIs and other service providers motivated/agreed to change policy in favour of women and poor rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been significant response to NBK advocacy and decisions have been changed in favour of poor and women at both union and upazila level (evidenced by UP budget changes, use of NBK lists to identify 	Difficult to assess achievement of this output as it is difficult to assess change in these unions and upazillas without having control unions and upazillas to compare the differences

rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of institutions changed policies 	<p>households for training, safety net support etc). Project monitoring data asserts that overall there have been targeted budgets to women of Tk 798,116 and to poor people Tk1,097,629 as a result of NBK influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited tracking of changes in policies (or decisions) by UP and Upazilla the evidence is not very clear. 	
2.3 Linkages between NBKs, LGIs and service providers including policy makers ensure services and rights for the women and poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of outcomes received through linkage establishment # of meetings and workshops held # of issues discussed and raised # of poor women acknowledged of right based services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear evidence of the effectiveness of linkages made by the NBKs to service providers particularly at the upazilla level – this has resulted in more targeted support to extreme poor households, including allocation of khas land, support to women with TB who could not get access to medical services (3,125 people got access to a range of services from agriculture, fisheries, livestock, health and low interest government loans). At the UP level 10,807 people got access to union services as a result of the work of the NBKs – including safety nets, different forms of certificates, sanitation, salish and arbitration Over 300 workshops and dialogues have been held between NBKs and the UP, upazilla, and service providers. These meetings covered issues of rights, gender, governance and leadership, poor, legal aid and project monitoring data indicates that over 50,000 women, men (both extreme poor and poor) have benefitted 	<p>The insertion of the words ‘policy-makers’ in this output mean that it is more difficult to achieve this output within this phase of the project. The project is working with individuals and institutions that do not make policy but implement it, at the local-level they can change decisions. The project has very limited reach to national-level policy-makers and so is limited in its influence over policy outcomes Overall however, the project is on track to deliver this output</p>
3.1 Rupantar’s organizational review report and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of OR plan reviewed and shared with other staffs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rupantar produced its own assessment of its organizational strengths and weaknesses that 	<p>This output is well underway and is likely to be fully achieved by the end of</p>

sustainable development action plan is produced and under implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of OD action plan developed and practiced 	<p>formed the basis for development of the OD support strategy with Verulam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The OD action plan is in place and the different tasks under development 	this year
3.2 Rupantar's management capacity is improved (Project to program approach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of staffs trained on professional courses ▪ # of OD plans addressed on organizational sustainability contests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Depending on the outcomes from the strategic planning, a plan for staff up-skilling will be developed which will need separate financing 	This output will be partially achieved by the end of 2013, as already there is considerable management capacity improvement as part of the OD process. However, full development of this capacity will be beyond the end of this phase of the project
3.3 Rupantar's competency improved with better strategic thinking and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rate of efficiency and effectiveness in program handling and project mgt. mechanism renovated ▪ # of staffs showed improvement ▪ Organization functioning on its reformed structures and new strategic planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is all still to be put in place 	At this stage of the OD process it is too early to assess the differences in efficiency and effectiveness. The organizational reforms will not be in place until the end of 2013 and will then need a period of support to aid the transition from old to new structures

Annex 8 Number of poor and extreme poor in women's committees

Table A.8.1 Changes in representation of poor and extreme poor on ward committees and in general membership: from 2009-2013

Union name	Changes in general membership		Changes in representation on ward committee	
	Poor	Extreme poor	Poor	Extreme poor
1. Jalma	Up (45-61%)	Down (22-10%)	Up (34-46%)	Up (13-20%)
2. Batiaghata	Up (41-49%)	Down (22-13%)	Up (30-47%)	Up (12-20%)
3. Gangarampur	Up (39-86%)	Down (19-7%)	Up (39-57%)	Up (15-28%)
4. Surkhali	Up (46-68%)	Down (17-9%)	Up (39-54%)	Down (16-10%)
5. Bhandarcote	Up (44-50%)	Down (18-13%)	Up (35-46%)	Up (13-21%)
6. Baliadanga	Up (51-57%)	Down (23-10%)	Up (34-48%)	Up (10-21%)
7. Amirpur	Up (51-54%)	Down (22-11%)	Up (29-76%)	Up (12-13%)
8. Banishanta	Down (77-72%)	Down (26-14%)	Up (52-76%)	Down (29-13%)
9. Kailashgonj	Up (68-72%)	Down (27-5%)	Up (46-60%)	Down (27-7%)
10. Tildanga	Up (75-80%)	Down (28-4%)	Up (48-66%)	Down (26-5%)
11. Bajua	Down (77-74%)	Down (30-8%)	Up (47-67%)	Down (24-10%)
12. Kamarkhola	Down (72-63%)	Down (31-7%)	Up (48-70%)	Down (32-10%)
13. Sutarkhali	Up (72-79%)	Down (28-9%)	Down (47-40%)	Down (25-10%)
14. Laudobe	Down (75-69%)	Down (28-3%)	Up (50-64%)	Down (24-4%)
15. Dacope	Up (68-82%)	Down (27-9%)	Up (52-64%)	Down (28-22%)
16. Pankhali	Down (85-79%)	Down (24-9%)	Up (50-78%)	Down (31-11%)
17. Rajnagor	Down (65-54%)	Down (32-6%)	Down (51-41%)	Down (49-24%)
18. Hurka	Up (58-89%)	Down (20-5%)	Up (52-83%)	Down (48-1%)
19. Gouramva	Up (53-78%)	Down (23-7%)	Down (67-56%)	Down (33-16%)
20. Ujalcur	Up (25-62%)	Down (88-17%)	Up (30-67%)	Down (70-13%)
21. Rampal	Down (77-64%)	Down (25-16%)	Down (73-67%)	Down (27-13%)
22. Parikhali	Up (5-66%)	Down (83-27%)	Up (15-70%)	Down (85-19%)

23. Bashtali	Up (76-80%)	Down (27-8%)	Down (70-61%)	Down (32-12%)
24. Baintala	Down (79-64%)	Up (12-16%)	Down (84-60%)	Same (16-16%)
25. Vospatia	Up (32-80%)	Down (62-14%)	Up (44-55%)	Down (56-30%)
26. Sundarban	Up (38-77%)	Down (46-2%)	Up (61-62%)	Down (39-4%)
27. Molikerber	Up (55-63%)	Down (34-27%)	Down (60-53%)	Down (40-36%)
28. Methikhali	Up (48-79%)	Down (33-2%)	Up (57-58%)	Down (43-7%)
29. Sonaitala	Up (61-86%)	Down (15-1%)	Down (78-41%)	Down (22-5%)
30. Burirdanga	Down (94-70%)	Down (37-1%)	Up (64-70%)	Down (36-13%)
31. Chila	Up (70-82%)	Down (25-2%)	Down (52-44%)	Down (48-6%)
32. Chandpai	UP (65-86%)	Down (24-2%)	Down (54-33%)	Down (47-8%)

Annex 9 Assessment of understanding of extreme poverty

A key focus of the fourth phase has been on extreme poverty, understanding what it means, establishing mechanisms to increase NBK membership from extreme poor households and ensuring they receive services that they are entitled to. This annex presents a brief analysis of Rupantar's progress in this area and a reflection on some of the issues it raises. It is intended as a background document for use by Rupantar as they further develop their conceptual model on women's empowerment and political engagement.

Building understanding of extreme poverty

Following the recommendations of the 2009 MTR, Rupantar followed a careful process to build understanding of extreme poverty across the organisation. Three areas of work followed:

1. developing an understanding of extreme poverty and poverty inside Rupantar and with the field staff and NBKs
2. commissioning a poverty mapping study to provide a categorisation of the working area for the project
3. a baseline survey against which impact on key stakeholder groups could be tracked.

First Rupantar developed definitions of extreme poverty which were then used by field staff with NBK members to develop their own definitions. Table A 10.1 compares the definitions of Rupantar and a Nari Bikas Kendra. As can be seen the NBK definition captures more of the multiple dimensions of poverty than the Rupantar version.

Then a poverty mapping study was commissioned. Unfortunately this did not deliver an operationally useful report and did not produce a simple way to map and categorise unions into different levels of poverty and vulnerability.

The baseline assessment that was conducted also failed to identify the key characteristics of poor and extreme poor households and did not differentiate in its sample between different levels of well-being in the NBK members. As a result this baseline is also not operationally useful.

When we look at the reasons for why neither the poverty mapping nor the baseline are fit for purpose, we can see that there is still some confusion about how to understand and define poverty and to monitor changes in well-being. This is illustrated in Table A9.1. which shows that the Rupantar definitions of poverty and extreme poverty do not capture a multidimensional understanding of poverty – including indicators of financial capabilities or one of the very critical issues for women's empowerment – access to information. The NBK definition on the other hand does provide indicators of financial capabilities, critical to understand in terms of differentiating between the poor and extreme poor. Neither set of definitions have indicators of social capabilities such as numbers of organisations that individuals are members of or hold key positions in, ability to have a voice and be listened to etc. again important indicators for a programme focused on developing empowerment and agency.

Table A9.1 Comparison between Rupantar definitions and definitions used by one Nari Bikas Kendra

	Extreme poor	Poor	Lower middle class
Rupantar			
Financial capabilities			
Physical capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No close access to safe drinking water • No access to medical services • Inadequate shelter (more than 5 people to a room) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer access to safe drinking water • No access to healthcare • Inadequate shelter • No access to household sanitation system 	
Human capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No opportunity to attend school • Illiterate • Stunted growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only completed primary education or illiterate • Stunted growth 	
Nari Bikas Kendra			
Financial capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have no savings • Cannot get labour opportunities every day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple sources of income so protected if lose one source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate other people's land as sharecroppers • Have small savings
Physical capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No land for dwelling house • No access to safe drinking water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No land for dwelling house • Many members of family live together in thatched house on other people's land/khas land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have land for dwelling house • Own 0.5 acre of cultivable land
Human capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot take two meals a day • No access to quality education for children • Suffer from poor nutrition • No access to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eats two meals of day but insufficient food • Suffer from poor nutrition • Deprived of basic rights • No access to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay costs of education for children but can't afford higher education • No access to information

Translating operational definitions into practice on the ground

During the MTR the team were interested to understand how NBK members perceive extreme poverty and poverty and use this judgement to determine who is poor or extreme poor. As Table A9.2 illustrates they have a more multi-dimensional understanding than presented by Rupantar. Table A9.2 presents the criteria used to identify extreme poor by several NBKs (data collected during MTR field visits). As can be seen these criteria are different to those in Table A9.1 and include some criteria for social capabilities. The lack of consistency between all these interpretations of extreme poverty indicates there is a question about the degree of understanding across the NBKs. As discussed in the main report, it is clear that Rupantar needs to work with the NBKs to develop a more standardised process for identification of extreme poor and one that can be agreed and used by all within the union including the union parishad and service providers.

Table A9.2 Criteria used by a number of NBKs to identify extreme poor women

Criteria	Physical capabilities	Social capabilities	Financial capabilities	Human capabilities
Factors recorded on NBK lists	No land Only homestead land Live in other person's house	Widow Abandoned wife	Old age pension No income-earning person VGD/VGF card-holder Beggar Driving rickshaw Selling berries Working as maid	Disabled Poor nutrition

Looking at other processes for identification of extreme poor and other definitions

Much pioneering work has been done in Bangladesh to identify and find ways of reaching extreme poor households to ensure they have access to the opportunities to develop their livelihoods, voice and agency. As discussed in the main report Rupantar is well positioned to access some of this understanding: in its project area the DFID-funded SHREE is operating, a project particularly focused on working with the extreme poor. In addition, SDC supported local governance projects SHARIQUE and DASCOH both have useful experiences in working with issues of extreme poverty that could be accessed by Rupantar.

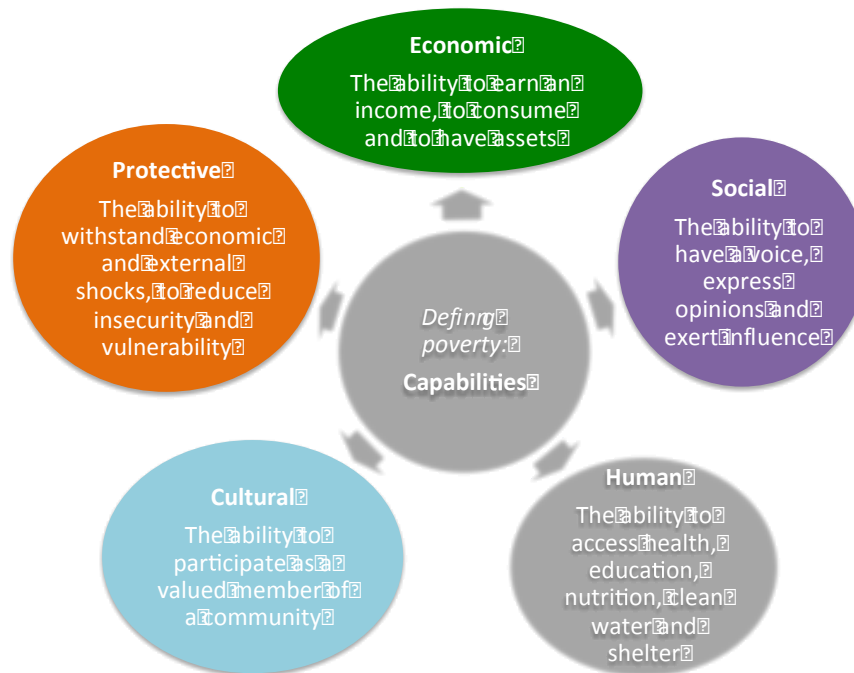
It may also be helpful to look at other definitions of extreme poverty to help in the identification of the types of criteria and indicators that could be developed by the NBKs, one such definition that captures much of what the women's empowerment model is trying to do is that provided by OECD/DAC 2001 (and Figure?):

"Poverty denotes people's exclusion from socially adequate living standards and it encompasses a range of dimensions. These cover distinct aspects of human capabilities: economic (income, livelihoods, decent work), human (health, education), political (empowerment, rights, voice), socio-cultural (status, dignity) and protective (insecurity, risk, vulnerability). Mainstreaming gender is essential for reducing poverty in all its dimensions. And sustaining the natural resource base is essential for poverty reduction to endure." (OECD/DAC (2001:18).

Looking at the model of women's empowerment that Rupantar have developed there are four key areas that cover all the capabilities necessary to help people move out of poverty:

- 1) **Voice and Influence:** building the capacity (human and political capabilities) of the poor and excluded to engage with, influence and hold accountable local and national institutions.
- 2) **Providing the context for meaningful negotiation, representation and accountability** so that poor and extreme poor women have the opportunity to exercise their voice meaningfully in forums where they are listened to, heard and responded to
- 3) **Changes to the 'rules of the game'** ensuring that policies, decisions, regulations and legislation as well as informal social and cultural norms at all levels (local to national) are supportive for changes in voice and access to assets and services, and to ensure protection from events that may increase poor women's vulnerability and reduce their resilience.
- 4) **Access to livelihood assets and services** building livelihood security for the poor through improving their access to diverse assets and services (by strengthening their voice and agency to claim their rights and entitlements to these livelihood assets and services)

OECD/DAC definition of multidimensional poverty



Annex 10 Positive changes as a result of the OD process

(comments from Rupantar staff during MTR)

- “Now we understand how to prioritise donors and think about specific strategies to target the donors”
- “We thought our policies were OK but now we realise they need to change, we have identified what has to be done and the gaps have been resolved and the policies have been changed”
- “The OD team have shown us to how to revise policies, so now we know how to do it for ourselves”
- “We already identified our weaknesses, but the OD process has shown us what can be done not just what our weaknesses are”
- “Before the theatre was a stand-alone unit but now we can see how the theatre can integrate across the projects”
- Before the two leaders thought but now the theatre team can think and evolve ideas
- “Now we have the chance to identify our programme focus, integrate the programme sectors, analyse the donor context and donor priorities and work out how to match Rupantar to these contexts”
- “We have engaged with a lot of networks but now we are assessing which networks are strategically important to us to engage with and which we don’t need”
- “The process itself is a benefit: it is Rupantar’s product not Verulam’s”
- “We faced a struggle in 2010, through this process we discussed why it happened and how to solve the problems and how to prevent it happening again, this has led to immediate changes”
- “We understand our weaknesses such as knowledge management and the need to share lessons between projects”
- “The OD process has helped me to understand Rupantar”
- “The OD process has helped the diagnostic capacity of senior management. There are a lot of good examples of learning and practice scattered in Rupantar, we have just started the stock-taking of our good practices as part of the OD process. “
- “We are now starting the path of a programmatic approach – to harmonise our ideas and link across processes, before we just coordinated across projects but there was no critical discussion of whether it was a programme. Before the OD process started I could only say this was the result of the SDC project or the Asia Foundation project, now by the end of the OD process I will be able say this is Rupantar’s result.”

Annex 11 Organisational Development progress assessment

A team-based approach has been taken to organizational development, with separate groups working on different areas. Each consultant from the OD support team have a designated Rupantar team that they work with.

OD tasks	Progress	Process	Challenges and follow up actions
Task 1 review and update human resource management policy, gender policy and financial management policy			
Human resource management policy	HR team Draft of HR policies done with analysis of the problems to be resolved. 3 meetings with HR expert, policy is under process need another 2 visits and will be finalized Main discussion on policy development is with senior-level staff, issues raised at different levels in the organization through monthly meetings and fed into higher-level review process Discussing only with senior-level people??? – doesn't appear to be a mixed level team Raise issue at different levels and issues collected (through normal monthly meeting)	Task teams with OD consultant support	All policies will have small implementation action plans
Gender policy	Gender team similar process and progress		
Financial and administrative Procurement policy	Financial team – behind in review of financial policy – first consultant discontinued. New consultant just started work with a recent. The consultant will review documents and plan a review process with the financial team	Include gender issues in financial policy	
Task 2: Review and update organizational governance, management system and structure			
A lot of tasks have been completed including making changes to the executive director positions. Removed the post of executive chairman and clarified the roles and responsibilities of the two executive		Organisation-wide discussions and agreements at Annual staff conference and discussions with	

<p>directors. Now have specified job descriptions. Approved new byelaws and agreed by government that it is possible to have two EDs. Voting powers of two EDs removed from executive committee because of conflict of interest issues. Now no conflict issues. All governance changes are to be incorporated into constitution – need further approval from government before this happens. This will only be submitted once the OD process is finished as there may be more changes..</p> <p>Organogram – draft has been prepared, but this will only be developed and finalized after OD process is complete, as there will be significant amounts of restructuring</p>	<p>executive committee and general body</p>		
<p>Task 3: Review and update long-term organizational strategic plan</p>			
<p>This process is currently underway and is based on SWOT analyses already carried out by Rupantar prior to the start of the OD process. Tentative identification of programme areas and priority donors has been carried out.</p> <p>Identified existing capacity and focus of activities and future key capacity areas</p> <p>Separated donors into priority development partners (funders) and strategic partners (who are helping to develop project documentation e.g. collaborating with BRAC Development Institute) – linking with partners with different capacities so can interchange and work together.</p>	<p>Field, middle and senior staff involved in small group analysis at different levels – did a SWOT (4-5) analysis on Rupantar, existing capacity, sent to Verulam for feedback</p> <p>Consultations still in progress and a lot to do</p> <p>Plan for draft strategy in June</p> <p>Finalised strategy by September</p>	<p>Moving from project to programme approach will be a major challenge for the organization. It is still not clear that there is shared understanding of what a programmatic approach might mean, some staff think it is simply clustering together similar projects under one head others understand it as developing a programme of work that includes some project activities that fit with the overall programme strategy but includes other activities such as research, analysis etc.</p>	
<p>Task 4: guide Rupantar in the review and development of their programmatic approaches</p>			
<p>Still to be done</p>	<p>Reviewed strategy of priority donors and how can match with them</p> <p>Donor coordination – shared that Rupantar is</p>	<p>Parallel work on donor priorities and setting-up meetings to discuss future funding possibilities</p>	

	doing work on OD with key donor partners – Oxfam GB, MJF, IOM, Asia Foundation and Water Aid, SDC - showed interest and want to know progress	Work on this task can only be completed once the strategic plan is in place.	
Task 5: Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system development			
Still to be done	Progress on this part of the OD plan is heavily dependent on the outcomes from the strategic planning process. So far there has been a short presentation to OD consultant on M&E which helped to identify issues to be addressed	Clear area of skill deficit in the organization that will need to be addressed.	Needs to be programmatic and project-based during transition. Will need to build in systems that ensure there is a shift from projectised to programme-based monitoring which will also need agreement from donors to Rupantar
Task 6: Knowledge management and communication strategy development			
Just started	Knowledge management - identified by Rupantar as a key area of concern for organizational development. They have had one meeting with the consultant so far and a programme of work is being developed.		
Task 7: Human resource management and development			
Still to be done	Still to be done as comes from tasks 3-6		
Task 8: review and update the financial management and accounting system			
Still to be done	This review will also include the procurement system. The financial management and accounting systems will be in line with the programmatic approach		Core budget always shortfall because of project-based, very few provide overheads for organization. How to recover fixed core costs - problem

Annex 12 Understanding the context for women's empowerment

Bangladesh Context: Women in Local Government

Bangladeshi society is largely rural, traditional and patriarchal. More than 70% of the population live and earn their living in rural areas. Over 40% of the total population lives in poverty and around 10% in extreme poverty. Women, particularly rural women, are disadvantaged with limited access to information, public services, incomes and employment opportunities. Typically, men control resources and dominate the decision making process. Violence and discrimination against women is quite extensive. Women's empowerment is hindered by existing patriarchy values, discriminatory laws, religious and cultural taboos and practices.

Bangladesh presents an interesting paradox. Having gained independence in 1971, it is now a democratic, moderate Muslim state with a parliamentary system. But despite the existence of reserved seats and a vibrant feminist movement (Jahan 1995), the political and administrative structure, culture and norms are gender biased (Nazneen and Sultan 2009). The two major political parties are led by women, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia and, between them, they have held the posts of prime minister and leader of the opposition since 1991. In addition, currently the speaker and the foreign, agriculture, and women's affairs ministries are headed by women. Yet women's rights issues do not have strong currency in Bangladesh politics and, despite women holding these top positions, historically the number of women in different electoral and decision-making bodies has been low.¹

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides a clear mandate for a viable, decentralized local government system with elected representatives and democratic participation of all citizens including women. However the spirit of the constitution for a self-functioning local government system with decentralized and equal jurisdictional and functional authority to all men and women elected remains elusive.

The provision of reserved seats ensures 30 per cent representation of women in the parliament and various tiers of local government, the Upazilla and Union Parishads. In the last national election held in 2008, 17 women were directly elected to the general seats. Combined with the 45 women MPs in the reserved seats, the number of women in the current parliament is 65, the highest since the creation of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Election Commission 2010). However, this numerical gain does not automatically translate into women having a greater voice in decision-making. The women in reserved seats are nominated and not directly linked to an electoral constituency. Given this scenario at the national level, the possible gains in voice and legitimacy made by women Union Parishad members carry significance for women's political empowerment in Bangladesh.¹

In the recent years, due to supportive governmental reforms and policies towards promotion of gender equity and especially women's participation in electoral and governance processes, women have become more active in local political structures. They are beginning to assume some leadership roles at the grassroots level. Thus, a positive momentum and real potentials for further empowerment of women exist. Initiatives for further development of women's knowledge, attitude,

¹ paragraph reproduced from Nazneen and Tasneem 2010 p.1-2

skills and capacity, and their involvement in development process and local political structures could take the women's empowerment agenda one more step forward. The community at large and the women in particular would benefit from such initiatives.

The Legal Framework of Women in Local Government in Bangladesh Provisions in the Constitution of Bangladesh

The Bangladesh constitution provides a number of articles for a widely participatory and democratic local government system particularly emphasizing participation of women on an equal footing. Other than the provisions for the LGs a number of other articles on equal rights of women complements and supports women's strong presence and role in the LGs. Articles 59 and 60 in Chapter III, Part IV of the Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh provide the framework for the composition, scope and powers of local government institutions to be established by acts of Parliament (GOB, 1972). Article 59(1) provides for local government in every administrative unit of the Republic, to be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law. Article 59(2) states that each of these bodies as referred in clause (1) shall subject, to the constitution and any other law, perform within the appropriate administrative unit such functions as shall be prescribed, including (a) administration and the work of public officers; (b) the maintenance of public order; (c) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development. In order to give effect to the above clauses Article 60 of the constitution mandates that the Parliament shall confer by the power of the law on the local government units to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain their funds.

Complementing articles 59 and 60, Article 11, under the Fundamental Principles of State policy, provides that the Republic shall be a democracy in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured. Article 9 states that the State shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women.

Several articles in the Bangladesh Constitution mandates equal rights to women in all spheres of private and public life including right to hold elected and appointed office. Article 28 (1) states that there will be no discrimination against any citizen on the basis of religion, race, sex, caste or place of birth. Article 28 (2) of the constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life. Article 27 entitles all citizens to equal protection of law and Article 10 provides to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life. The Constitution also mandates that nothing shall prevent the state from making special provision in favor of women (Article 28 (4)).

Women's participation in Local Government law

The governance system of the country includes Local Governments both for the urban and rural areas under laws enacted for all. Currently, in Bangladesh, four elected local government units are in position. The Union Parishads (UP) and the Upazila Parishads (UZP) in the rural areas and the Pourashavas (PS) and City Corporations (CC) in the urban area. Elected chairs and councilors are carrying out the day-to-day activities of these bodies except the UZP which was elected in early 2009 after 18 years of suspension but is not yet fully functional. The Zila Parishads law was enacted in 2001 and was replaced by one in 2009, but elections have not been held. An examination of the different laws and its provisions for both functional and non-functional local

government enables one to identify the structural, jurisdictional and institutional arrangements that create issues in women's effective roles and positions in the LGs.

The Union Parishad(UP) Act, 2009

The Union Parishad, the lowest unit, as is well-known, is the longest existing LG in the country. However the inclusion of women as elected representatives is fairly recent. The UP to date is set up and functions on the basis of the UP Ordinance of 1983 which was amended twice (1993, 1997). This law was revised in the form of the Local Government Act, 2009 but the changes made are yet to be implemented. Before the 1997 Amendment women were nominated to the councils by the elected chairs or the local administrative officers (DC, UNO). This 1997 amendment introduced the provision of three seats, reserved for women to be directly elected by the voters of specified constituencies. The second major change was the re-demarcation of the union into nine wards in place of the previous three broad wards, each to be represented by one elected member, male or female. The nine wards are grouped into three broader wards, each represented by an elected women member from this constituency of three general seats. The women's wards are referred in the law as 'reserved seats'.

Under Article 10 of the UP Act 2009, the following sub sections define the provisions for women in the UPs: Sub section (1) states "a Union Parishad shall consist of a Chairman and twelve members of whom nine are to be member's of general seats and three will be members of reserved seats". But the condition remains that nothing shall prevent a woman from being elected to any of the nine general seats provided in sub-section (1) in Article 2 of the Act states that for the purposes of electing members to the reserved seats a union has to be divided into three wards. Sub-section 9 in Article 13 on the subject of "Demarcation of Wards", states that the UNO appointed Demarcation Officer will demarcate the wards for the Reserve seats.

As provided in the law women can contest the general seats but given the socio-cultural and economic context very few women venture to do so. Very few women contest and even fewer among them get elected to the general seats or the chair's position. Apparently it may seem that by this provision women in the reserved seats hold greater responsibilities and more importantly, powers by virtue of representing larger (three) wards compared to the general seat representatives who represents only one third of women's constituency. In practice however, it is quite the opposite. The reserve seats for women overlap that of three others resulting in two members representing the same seat. This leads to confusion and competition resulting in mis-governance.

There is no clear cut definition of the role and functions of the 'reserve' seat in the amendment. Representatives in these seats came to be virtually 'unwanted' in the UPs as has been reported in a number of studies of UP women members and their roles. The functions and roles of the women in the reserved seats and the general seats are not specified in the Law, nor is it stated that the women members would be responsible for the same duties as the members from the general seats. This resulted in confusion on the part of the newly elected women and created a scope for the chairmen to exclude women from UP functions. A similar arrangement for the women elected to the reserved seats in the Pourashavas and the City Corporations resulted in the same situation of powerlessness of the women commissioners. The status of women's reserved seats remained the same in the subsequent revised laws for all the LG units.

Government circulars on women's participation in the UP

The structural problems of women's incorporation in the local governments, particularly the UP in which the constituencies of the reserve seats and the general seats overlap have been affecting women's participation in the councils. Women are marginalized in the UP functions in local development and service delivery in such areas as shalish, law and order maintenance, infrastructure building, citizenship certification, birth and death registration, etc.

In addition to this, the weaknesses of the law restrict them in taking up responsibilities. The UP Act (remains the same in the Act of 2009) does not clearly define the functional jurisdictions for the women councilors in the Union Parishad nor mention that it is the same as that of the general members. On the other hand, it is given a separate status by the statement that these would be referred to as 'reserve seats for women'. This sets the women aside as a separate category in the councils leaving scope for the interpretation that when the general seats are mentioned it is not applicable for the reserve seats. The chairs and male members have been using this major oversight in the law to discriminate and often exclude the women councillors from participating in UP activities. For example it is a common complain of the women members that the UP Chairs often prevent them from participating in important decisions in the council. The assumption emanating from a general perception that matters such as budget, infrastructure projects and financial management are subjects that only men are capable of dealing, combining with the categorization of reserve seats for women as a separate group results in their exclusion from important UP functions. Thus the labelling of the women councilors as a separate category (reserve seat holders) in the law creates un-clarity and vagueness providing scope for chairs, in almost all cases men, to interpret it to exclude women members from all main functions of the councils.

Thus initially, when the first batch of women were elected to the UPs on the basis of new law, women were denied a role in project planning, implementation, budget making, financial management, preparing list and distribution of VGD and VGF cards under the food security schemes. Women were also denied the right to provide citizenship, character and other certificates usually issued by male representatives. The women were also reported to be often excluded from meetings and important decisions of the UPs.

In this situation of deprivation of the women members from participation in UP functions due to the un-clarity of the ordinance, the ministry had responded positively to the complaints from the elected women members and the concerned civil society organization including the media; the ministry issued circulars/orders from the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural development & Cooperatives specifying some roles and positions that have to be provided to women reserve seat members. These included:

- ~ Formation of five additional standing committees (in addition to the existing ones) in which women will be chairs,
- ~ Reservation of the position of chairs for women in one third of the important UP Project Implementation Committees,
- ~ Women have to be members in the committees that they are not chairs,
- ~ Women to be made members of tube-well installation committees of each ward.
- ~ Women to be made members of committee for listing VGD, VGF card beneficiaries,

- ~ Women members to be chairs of committee for selection of beneficiaries of old age pension,
- ~ Women to chair a proposed Social Development Committee created for each of the three reserve seat wards.

Despite this prompt affirmative action on the part of the government in the form of orders for ensuring the women member's participation in the councils' development activities and services, it failed to bring the desired result. The women councillors could not avail the benefits of the government orders because of many reasons, the most immediate being a) women were not aware or informed of the orders from the government by the chairs/relevant authorities, b) women did not know the procedures for the formation of the committees and the chairs did not cooperate c) women did not have the financial or technical resources to initiate the processes. In addition the chairs and the male members continued to resist implementing these orders from the government and no action was taken for non-compliance. In many places the women members approached the UNOs and other Upazila officials seeking intervention for the chairmen to comply with the orders but with no success. Thus, although the socio-cultural and economic barriers to women's participation in the political institution of the UP were overcome to some extent by women's elections, this anomaly in the law prevented the removal of the institutional resistances to their incorporation in the UP functions.

The reintroduction of the Upazila Parishad in 2009

With the re-establishment of the Upazila Parishads (UZP) and elections to the 481 among 482 Parishads in 2009, Bangladesh took a crucial step forward in its democratic development. After a break of 20 years, powers have again been vested in democratically elected institutions at the level of government which manages the bulk of development services needed to achieve the MDGs and meet the wider development challenges. The re-instating Act of 2009 re-enacted an updated Upazila Parishad Act, assigning clear roles, functions and powers to elected Parishads or councils in 13 main areas. Through the Act, the UZPs have been empowered to play a major role in the management of the Upazila health complexes and public health engineering, social services and family welfare, women and youth development, primary and mass education, agricultural extension, infrastructure development, livestock protection, fishery and disaster management. The representational arrangement of the Parishads as laid out with the Act in theory has the potential to provide for more inclusive local democracy. The traditional bias of indirect representation at higher tiers towards women (the one representative from each Parishad at local level more often than not being a man from a dominant group) has been alleviated by the representation of 30 percent women in the Upazila Parishads and one of two vice-chair positions being reserved for a woman. Women UP members will also be represented on the council, once elected. While there is no perfect system, the mix of indirectly elected members each representing a Union and directly elected chair and vice-chairs each representing the entire Upazila has the potential to provide the basis for both strong citizen-Parishad relations while ensuring capacity to address development changes across the entire Upazila. Upazila Parishads could mark a major step forward bringing sound democratic processes to the arguably most important level of government for most poor women and men in the country. The Upazila, as an administrative unit and spatial location, occupies a strategic political and administrative position in Bangladesh and is equally important from a service delivery perspective as most public service providers have physical presence at the Upazila level. Indeed, most government departments stop at the Upazila level in terms of their delivery and reach. The

only missing link at the Upazila level remains the representative structure and character that can integrate the disjointed and numerous social, political, and administrative functions within a single body. The Upazila Parishad Ordinance 2008, and later the Upazila Parishad Act 2009 are designed to fill this long-existing gap.²

Raising voice, changing expectations, achieving social legitimacy of women public representatives.

However, studies also indicate that campaign and work experience in the UP have led women to learn how to communicate their views, negotiate their positions and to exercise their voice (ADB 2004; Khan and Mohsin 2008). About 78 per cent of 641 women surveyed by Khan and Mohsin (2008) had participated in budget discussions and about 52 percent had suggested changes during discussions on various proposals. Admittedly, participation in discussions or making suggestions does not automatically imply that women representatives have an effective voice.

Many women representatives have complained that their views are disregarded by the chair and the male members (Panday 2008). The male resistance experienced by the women is not unique to Bangladesh (Goetz and Nyamu- Musembi 2008) but the act of women voicing their views at UP meetings and in public in a context where, before direct elections, very few did, is significant.¹

In fact, women members have become more critical and vocal about the difficulties they experience because of the gender biased attitude and behaviour of male colleagues and the problems that lie within the UP system. One woman put it succinctly, *'This is a system created by the men, for the men, it is not ours'* (interview, UP member 1, Pathways Digital Story Workshop, 20 November 2009). Women in both Frankl (2004) and Khan and Mohsin's (2008) study pointed out that they were elected by the people of three wards, whereas their male counterparts were elected by only one, which means they voice the demands of a larger group. Because women in reserved seats are elected by a larger constituency than their male counterparts, this gives them the sense that their voices have legitimacy, and women UP members have expressed this in many forums (*The Daily Star*, 8 March 2010).

One female UP member pointedly said: *Oh, they in the parishad say, '[W]hy does a poor woman have such a loud voice? Who is she?' and I remind them, I was elected directly by people in three wards. I am there to represent their views. I have as much right to speak as they do.* (Pathways Digital Story Workshop, 20 November 2009).

In some cases, women UP members approached other actors to strengthen their voice. They have sought help from the women's organisations for legal, human rights and administrative training to increase their knowledge and skills. They urged the women's organisations to raise these issues in different forums on behalf of women members. In fact, one of the key leaders of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, the largest women's organisation with 150,000 members, said: *It was after the 1997 elections that the women UP members sought our help to tackle gender bias within UP and ask for training. That is when we realised that our work on women's representation needs to extensively focus on the UP women members... We started pressuring*

² paragraph reproduced from Hossain and Akhter 2011

the government. The women ward commissioners in Khulna filed a case in court, demanding they be allowed to exercise their powers as specified in the government circular with our help. And our work on the local government just took off from there...(Interview, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad 2,18 July 2008).¹

This confirms that the importance of the nature of the link between civil society organisations and the formal political arena for strengthening women's voice (Goetz and Nyamu-Musembi 2008).¹

Invariably, women's participation in election campaigns and the investment they made in terms of money, time and effort influenced how women saw their roles as UP members. In Frankl's (2004) study the women interviewed pointed out that since they invested a lot of effort into being elected they did not want to be passive. The following quote highlights what many women UP representatives feel: 'we do not want to be treated like dolls or show pieces, we are not tokens!' (*The Independent*, 3 February 2010).

Admittedly, increasing consciousness of their role in local government does not translate into women being effective agents. However, their critique of the system and awareness about development issues (about 65 per cent women in Frankl's (2004) study could elaborate on what the local development issues are) show the women are very clear about their aspirations and roles. However, not all women UP members are conscious of, or have high aspirations of their roles.

An area where women UP members have been able to firmly establish their role and legitimacy is in resolving family disputes. The dispute resolution sessions are either held at the UP arbitration council or are administered through an informal committee at the local level (*shalish*). About 90 per cent of the 641 women UP members interviewed by Khan and Mohsin (2008) had participated in *shalish* while about 44 per cent reported they had presided over some *shalish* sessions. Frankl (2004) argued that the provision of reserved seats for women and the government notice that women serve as members of UP committees, created space for women to participate in these *shalish*.

Undeniably, the space created by these formal provisions was supported by various NGO and women's organisations' training programmes, which focus on alternative dispute resolution and human rights. These programmes targeted women UP members for legal and human rights training. This has changed the nature of the space which used to be male dominated.

One female UP member explained: Women were not a part of the *shalish*, we could not speak, we could not decide but only spoke when we were asked questions. Now, we are preferred by local people, particularly when it comes to women's issues, such as dowry, divorce etc. (Hassan *et al.* 2009).¹

There are several reasons why women were able to gain legitimacy in this area. The community, particularly women, are comfortable in discussing matters related to marriage, divorce, domestic violence, dowry related violence, polygamy, etc. With women UP members, the widely held view within the community and at the official level is that, given their experiences as

¹ paragraph reproduced from Nazneen and Tasneem 2010 p.3-5

women, they would be able to understand and empathise with these kinds of problems (Khan and Mohsin 2008).¹

Admittedly, this raises questions about whether it limits women's role and legitimacy to areas that deal with women's concerns. Studies show that women were mainly included in the standing committees that dealt with 'soft issues', i.e. women and children's welfare committees and family planning committees (Hassan 1999; Panday 2008). Invariably, the current development policy and funding conditionalities in Bangladesh emphasise inclusion and participation of women. This created space for female UP members to be part of the different development initiatives implemented by the government and NGOs. The fact that women representatives have gained social legitimacy is important for sustaining the bureaucratic commitment for ensuring women's representation in the formal political sphere (Goetz and Nyamu-Musembi 2008).¹

The discussion above shows that despite the structural and attitudinal obstacles, women's entry into politics through a system of reserved seats with direct elections, have strengthened their voice and social legitimacy to represent certain types of 'women's issues'. The centralised nature of Bangladesh government and politics remains a key obstacle. The UP is a weak institution since it cannot take any substantive or policy decision without the approval of central government. The central government control on local government pervades all its functions and weakens its financial capacity to act (Khan and Mohsin 2008). This implies that, for women, gains may remain limited to the local level. Being active in a weak institution will not allow women to have a significant impact on political parties or over policy-related decisions. Many have argued that the political parties and the state were only willing to have direct elections to the reserved seats at the local level and to create other provisions for women's participation, as these were not politically costly.¹

The recent contestations over devolution of power between the members of parliament and the elected chairpersons and members (including female) of Upzilla and Union Parishads show that a scope for collective action by local representatives exists. This may create an opportunity for women representatives to establish strategic links with male members for collective bargaining with the political parties (interview, Mirza Hassan 15 February 2010).¹

It is difficult to draw conclusions about whether quotas or reserved seats lead to effective representation and women's political empowerment through increasing their voice and access to decision-making spaces. In the case of Bangladesh, undeniably, direct elections and inclusion on standing committees has increased the visibility of women. This, in a context where women's empowerment related interests remain unarticulated, has made it viable for women to lay a claim to the formal political sphere (Mansbridge 1999). Moreover, women have gained social legitimacy and acceptance in formally participating and deciding on matters that are perceived as 'women's issues'. All of these indicate that these provisions have partially contributed towards allowing women to put their 'foot in the door'. In other words, these created the opportunity for women to learn the rules of the game and changed their aspirations at the local level. Undeniably, this increase in visibility and creation of social legitimacy is important for

¹ paragraph reproduced from Nazneen and Tasneem 2010 p.5-6

ensuring bureaucratic commitment towards political empowerment of women (Mansbridge 1999; Goetz and Nyamu-Musembi 2008).⁸¹

However, questions still remain about whether these gains made by women would lead to larger changes at the local level. For transforming local politics, various support systems are required. These include clear demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of female UP members, alliances with women's organisations, effective training programmes run by NGOs and government and strengthening of the UP as an institution through decentralisation. The latter may prove difficult given the centralised structure and nature of political parties and culture in Bangladesh.¹

Women UP members in Bangladesh have established their legitimacy as actors when it comes to family disputes, but how far they can 'act for' women on economic and infrastructural development issues, where they will face far greater contestation from colleagues, community and state officials, remains to be seen.¹

These questions perhaps bring us to what Alcântara Costa (2010) points out, that if a few women enter politics, women change, but politics remains the same. If we want politics to change, entry of women into formal politics is a necessary but not sufficient condition. We need to work on changing the patriarchal structure and culture within the political parties and systems. Given the history of military rule and the polarised nature of civil society among two party camps, feminist groups in Bangladesh have been reluctant to engage with political parties, since this undermines their credibility and legitimacy.¹

Feminist groups have interacted with the female UP members, female MPs and women's wings of political parties. However, these interactions, while sincere and illuminating, have not led to changes in mainstream politics (Nazneen and Sultan 2009). Perhaps both groups, feminists and women representatives, have to explore alternative ways of engagement and create an understanding that, without women's inclusion and equal participation in all decision making structures, the project of democratization remains incomplete (Alcântara Costa 2010).¹

Strong and long lasting citizen led initiatives, both by women and men, is essential to raise their concerns in an articulated manner at different levels to make appropriate rules and procedures be followed. This will help to them play an appropriate participating role as public representatives. There is a strong need to address knowledge and skill gaps to perform UP and UZP functions.

⁸ paragraph reproduced from Nazneen and Tasneem 2010 p.7

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